



STAR TREK®
THE NEXT GENERATION™
ROLE PLAYING GAME



NARRATOR'S TOOLKIT





A VIACOM COMPANY

Difficulty Number / Description

0	Automatic action - no roll required
3, **4,** 5	Routine
6, **7,** 8	Moderate
9, **10,** 11	Challenging
12, **13,** 14	Difficult
15+	Nearly Impossible

Psionic Skills Range

Range	Difficulty Modifier
Touch	-1
Point Blank (5m or less)	+0
Short (5.1-20m)	+1
Medium (20.1-50m)	+2
Long (50.1-100m)	+3
Extreme (over 100m)	+4

Ranged Combat Difficulty

Range	Difficulty
Point Blank	Routine (3)
Short Range	Routine (4)
Medium Range	Moderate (7)
Long Range	Challenging (10)

Psionic Skills Modifiers

Circumstance	Difficulty Modifier
Environmental interference	
Strange energy fields that warp psionics	+1 to +3
Using Psionic Skill through large amounts of rock (or like substance)	+1 to +2
Large number of minds thinking or feeling the same thing (Receptive Skills only)	
2 minds	-1
3-4 mind	-2
5-8 minds	-3
9-16 minds	-4
17-32 minds	-5
33-64 minds	-6
65-128 minds	-7
129-256 minds	-8
257-512 minds	-9
513-1,024 minds	-10
... and so on	
Character or target is injured	See Wound Level Table
Character is in combat	+1
Extremely strange, bizarre, or unusual minds	+1 to +3
Character cannot see target directly	+1

Test Modifiers

Situation	Modifier
Lack of proper tools or equipment	+1 Difficulty (or more)
Using particularly good or high-quality equipment	-1 Difficulty (or more)
Using off hand (unless character has Ambidexterity Advantage)	+1 Difficulty
Visual Interference (for Search and similar Skills)	
Light smoke, dim light	*+1 Difficulty*
Heavy smoke, moonlight	*+2 Difficulty*
Very thick smoke, total darkness	*+3 Difficulty*
Zero Gravity (unless character is Zero-G Trained or makes a Routine (4) Personal Equipment (Environmental Suit)	*+1 Difficulty*
Zero Gravity	+1 Difficulty

Terrain Modifiers

Terrain Type	Modifier
Swampy	+3
Mountainous/Steep	+2
Wet/Slick/Icy	+2
Water (2' or higher)	+2
Obstacles, many/large	+2
Obstacles, few/small	+1
Sandy	+1
Rocky	+1
Extremely flat or even	-1
Paved	-2

Default Renown Difficulties

Difficulty	Description
3-5	Routine: Your Ship
6-8	Moderate: Starfleet
9-11	Challenging: Your Home Planet, the Sector
12-14	Difficult: The Federation, the Quadrant
15+	Nearly Impossible: Across Known Space

Additional Modifiers

Situation	Modifier to Target's Renown Test
Same Species	no modifier
Different friendly species (Humans and Vulcans)	+1 Difficulty
Different hostile species (Humans and Cardassians)	+2 Difficulty
Different alien species (Humans and Anticans)	+4 Difficulty
Both characters operate on same planet	-2 Difficulty
Both characters operate in same immediate region of space (system or group of systems)	-1 Difficulty
Both characters operate in same sector	no modifier
Characters normally operate far from one another (across a quadrant)	+1 to +5 Difficulty
Opposing character would probably know target (he has read or studied him, heard stories from his compatriots, etc.)	-1 to -3 Difficulty
Opposing character would probably not know target (a backwater miner trying to recognize a Starfleet officer, etc.)	+1 to +5 Difficulty

Starship Maneuvers

Maneuver	Difficulty
Turn to port/starboard	Routine (4)
Climb/dive	Routine (5)
Climb/dive and turn	Moderate (6)
Hard to port/starboard	Moderate (7)
Steep climb/dive	Moderate (7)
Steep climb/dive and turn	Moderate (8)
Steep climb/dive and hard turn	Challenging (9)

Movement Table

Type of Movement	Rate	Difficulty
Crawl	5m per action	No roll
Walk	10m per action	No roll
Run	15m per action	Routine (5)
Sprint	20m per action	Moderate (7)
Swim	3m per action	Routine (4)
Jump	2m forward, 1m up	Moderate (6)
Climb	2m per action	Moderate (7)

Lifting

Weight	Difficulty
Up to 20kg	No roll required
21-50kg	Routine (2-4)
51-150kg	Moderate (5-7)
151-300kg	Challenging (8-10)
301-500kg	Difficult (11-13)
Over 500kg	Nearly Impossible (14+)

Experience Point Awards

Points	Circumstance
1 to 2	Characters accomplished the goal(s) of the episode
-1	Characters accomplished the goal(s) of the episode, but did so poorly or caused additional problems
+1	Characters accomplished the goal(s) of the episode in an exemplary and clever fashion
1	Characters failed to accomplish the goals of the episode, but nevertheless did their best and learned from their failures
+0	Characters were roleplayed properly
+1 to +2	Characters were roleplayed well
-1 to -2	Characters were roleplayed poorly
+1 to +2	Characters did or accomplished something which was of extraordinary service or benefit to Starfleet, the Federation or its citizens, or which required great personal sacrifice on the characters" part
+1	Characters triumphed against overwhelming odds or overcame tremendous obstacles

Immediate Actions (acts which take no time in combat)

- Dropping a weapon
- Shouting an order; brief communication ("We come in peace!")
- Casually observing the surroundings
- Making an Initiative Test
- Certain Attribute Tests

Timed Actions (acts which take time and require an action in combat)

- **Drawing a weapon.** It takes an action to draw a weapon. A character can draw a weapon and fire it during the same round, but this counts as a Multiple Action (see below).
- **Combat Maneuvers.** See the Combat Maneuvers Table.
- **Movement Maneuvers.** See the Movement Maneuvers Table.
- **Reloading.** Most weapons have an ammunition supply (which determines how many times the weapon can fire before it is exhausted or requires reloading). Unless specified otherwise in the weapon's game statistics, reloading it (if possible) takes an action.
- **Stun setting.** Most energy weapons have variable damage and range settings. A character can switch a weapon's setting without making a Skill Test, but doing so takes an action.
- **Taking a tricorder or sensor reading.** Taking a basic tricorder or sensor reading requires an action; more detailed or difficult scans may take multiple actions, at the Narrator's discretion.
- **First aid.** Applying first aid to an injured character takes an action.
- **Making a Test.** Making most Skill Tests requires an action; Attribute Tests may or may not require an action. However, it is always up to the Narrator to decide whether a particular roll is a Timed action or an Immediate action.

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Cover

Cover	Armor
Thin wooden door	6
Wooden door	8
Thin, unarmored metal door	10
Reinforced metal door; large rocks	14
Armored bulkhead	20
Heavily-armored security door	24

Opposed Test Modifiers

Situation	Modifier
Small Advantage (sun in opponent's eyes)	+1 to Test Result
Moderate Advantage (opponent has very bad footing)	+2 to TR
Significant Advantage (opponent has suffered significant relevant injury)	+3 to TR
Dominating Advantage (opponent is blinded and badly injured)	+4 to TR
Small Disadvantage (a loud noise momentarily distracts you)	-1 to TR
Moderate Disadvantage (you are in poor position to face your opponent; significantly below him, on fluctuating terrain, etc.)	-2 to TR
Significant Disadvantage (you are caught completely off guard; your opponent is cheating, possesses important information which you do not, etc.)	-3 to TR
Dominating Disadvantage (you have suffered major damage or injury)	-4 to TR

Degree of Injury

Degree of Injury	Difficulty to Diagnose/Heal
Stunned	Routine (4)
Injured	Moderate (7)
Wounded	Challenging (8)
Incapacitated	Difficult(13)
Near Death	Impossible (15)

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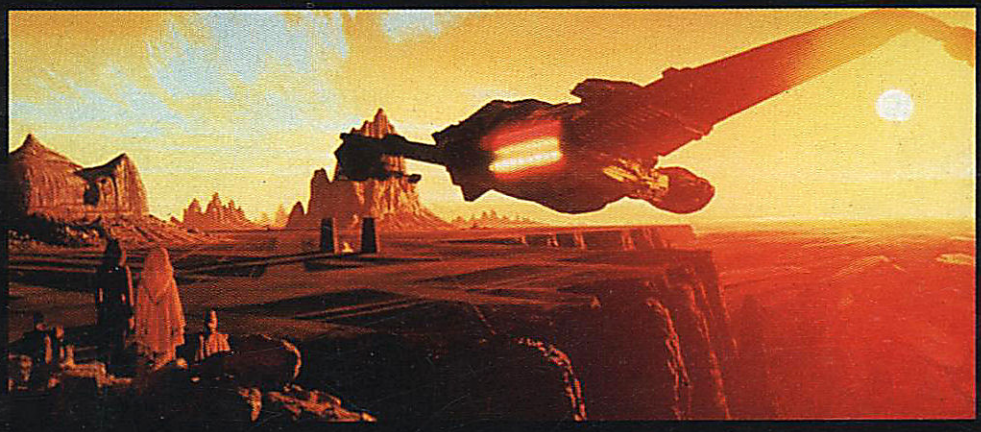
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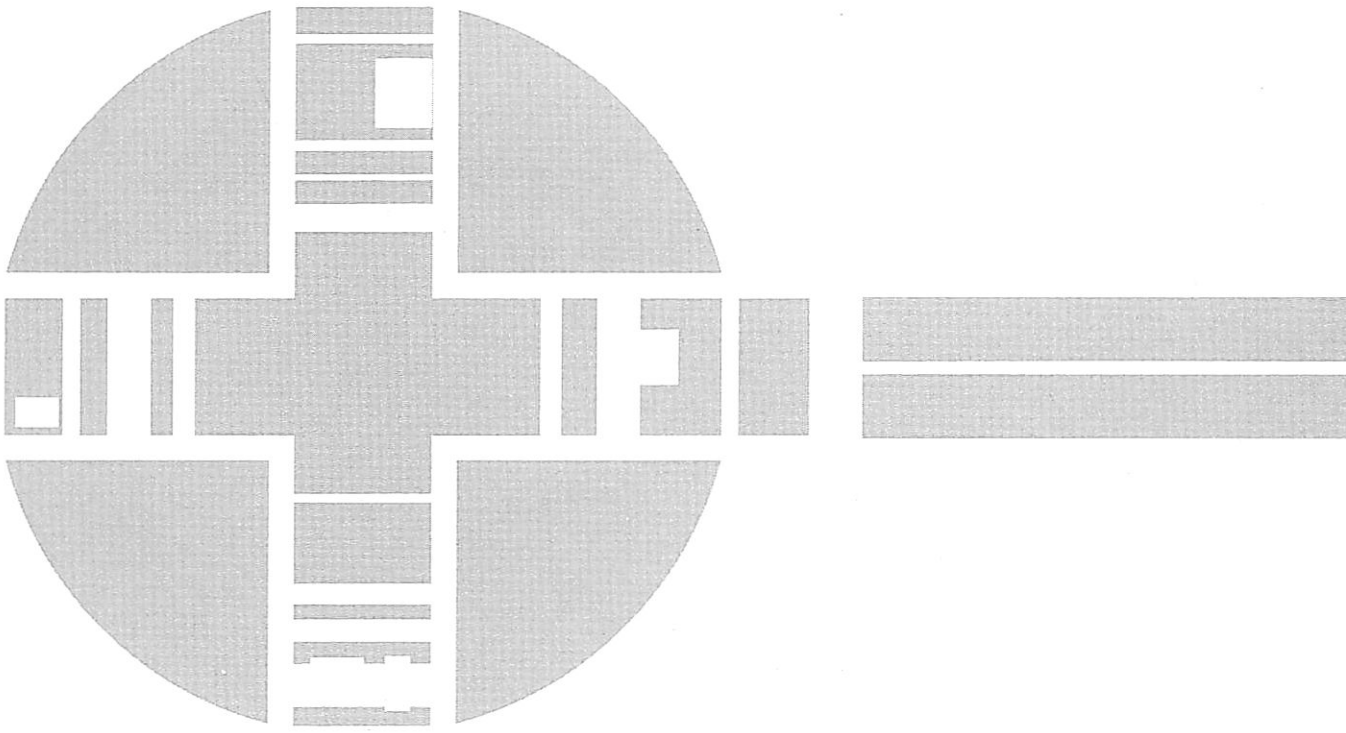


NARRATOR'S TOOLKIT



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Introduction

"Congratulations," Admiral Ossman said, standing in full dress uniform before the panoramic view of San Francisco Bay. "Let me be the first to commend you on your new command. The U.S.S. Carter *is a small ship but she's an important one."*

Thompson smiled but maintained the formal pose a Starfleet officer presented when being addressed by a higher officer. He could hardly contain his excitement — the Admiral had just told Thompson his new assignment. It meant a lot to him to have his old mentor from his Academy days give him the good news.

"A diplomatic vessel is a challenging ship for a new captain," Ossman continued. "But I think you'll prove yourself worthy of her. I've reviewed your service record: superlative interpersonal skills, excellent problem solving, fine conflict resolution. You've become a well-rounded officer." Inwardly, Thompson beamed.

"Thank you, sir." Thompson said. "That means a lot coming from you. Your career provided many examples for me to follow during my years in Starfleet."

"Glad to hear it. You'll need those skills. Out on the border, among the non-Federation species, problem solving is too often equated with violence. I hope you'll exercise restraint when encountering such cultures. Especially those along the Neutral Zone…"

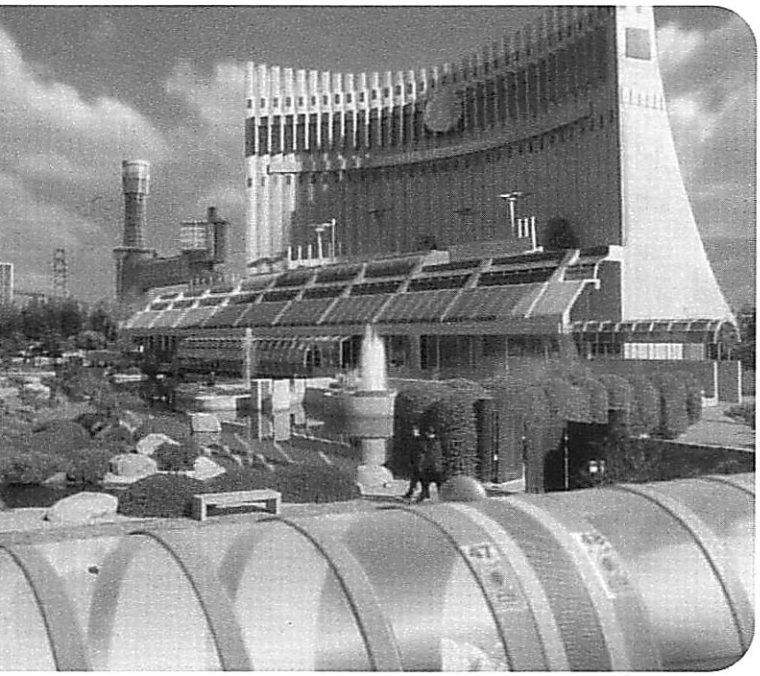
"The Neutral Zone?! Is that where the Carter *is headed, sir?"*

"It is. Your first mission is to rendezvous with a Romulan diplomatic attaché."

"Sounds simple enough, sir."

Admiral Ossman smiled. "That's what I thought — at first. But Starfleet Intelligence has discovered that the Tal Shiar *don't want this attaché to arrive in one piece. You may well encounter opposition, Captain Thompson."*

Thompson tried hard to hide the consternation he now felt. His new command wouldn't be a routine, Academy exercise. It was the real thing. There would be no repeating the test for a higher score. Out there, you only get one chance…



Think of the Narrators' Toolkit as Starfleet Academy for Narrators. Okay, that's a bit silly, but the comparison works. This books provides you, the Narrator, with all the basics and many advanced tips with which to guide your game where you want it to go. Like Starfleet diplomacy, no situation can be mapped out fully ahead of time — the unpredictable actions of those involved will almost always steer you off course. But, armed with the techniques given herein, you can bring the story around again to your desired heading, much as a Starfleet captain's training allows her to take command of any unruly situation and bring order from chaos.

Narrating a *Star Trek* episode is not unlike the challenges faced by a Starfleet officer. The officer must balance the ideals of the Federation against the needs of a situation, just as the Narrator has to balance the needs of a well-crafted story against the often-uncontrollable choices of players. No matter how much planning you put into an episode, it often comes down to flying by the seat of your pants — with no instrumentation and only your instincts to guide you as you make irrevocable decisions on the instant. This Toolkit will help you stay the course, no matter how many eddies and false twists your story takes.

Has the plot been muddied by the Crew's at-odds goals? Refocus on the theme — is the episode an action story or a mystery? The Toolkit will help you determine this and thus allow you to step back from the spontaneous action and figure out how to incorporate any player-imposed goal and still keep the game on track. Maybe that Crewmember's insistence on finding the source of the anomalous energy readings — your excuse to get the Away Team onto the planet — will lead him to a major clue to the mystery or a fight with the villain's henchmen.

Whatever the episode or its needs, the art and craft of Narrating will become effortless and fun after you incorporate the Narrators Toolkit's tips and techniques.

Synopsis

In addition to this chapter, this book contains...

• **Chapter One: Advice to the Narrator** Numerous tips and techniques for the Narrator to use when telling *Star Trek* stories. Narrating a roleplaying session well is an art form, and there are many guidelines but few hard rules. The advice given here was gleaned from years of roleplaying experience; it will help the Narrator craft stories that will leave players begging for further adventures.

• **Chapter Two: Advanced Storytelling** Once the basics have been mastered, there are a few tricks a Narrator can use to turn what might otherwise be an average story into an intense experience every bit as involving as the best *Star Trek* movie or television episode.

• **Chapter Three: Hide and Q** A complete *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* episode, based on the popular television episode. The Crew is tested by Q and one

must choose to accept godhood or remain in a fragile human existence — but the choice is not as simple as it seems...

• **Chapter Four: Forms** Here are the essential forms from the *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* rulesbook, in a black-and-white, photocopy-friendly format. Permission is given to photocopy these forms for game use.



Advice to Narrators

This chapter expands on the guidelines and advice in Chapters VII and VIII of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* rule book. It covers questions of storytelling, story design and similar common concerns of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* Narrator. Taking roleplaying universals and translating them into the *Star Trek* milieu and mythos can be tricky; this chapter will help you stay on course whether you are an experienced roleplayer or new to this particular form of storytelling.

In addition, some specific issues that are likely to arise during a *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* series receive coverage here. Questions of rank, skill and knowledge sometimes occur in other roleplaying games, but in the world of Starfleet they take on a fairly central role. The Narrator needs to be ready to handle those questions and turn them into powerful advantages rather than gray areas in her game.

This chapter also features some advice for structuring a *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* series using some advanced play options. It will give you guidelines whether you choose to take on the specific roles of the crew of the starship *Enterprise* under the command of Captain Picard, adopt the uniquely refreshing perspective of the lower decks or try the flexible and exciting techniques of troupe style play. Even if you don't try any of these techniques for your entire series, dipping into this palette can provide an interesting change of pace for players and Narrator alike.

A Closer Look at the Narrator

Being a good Narrator is all about balance. The interests of the story have to be equalized against the interests of the players. Players have to be balanced against one another so that nobody winds up taking over the game. The stories themselves have to be well-distributed; too many stories of one kind or too many episodes centering on one theme can leave the series stale and dull. There is only so much time in a given play session, so individual elements of narration have to be balanced: don't spend so much time on the plot that you neglect character, setting and theme. The dramatic contradictions within the *Star Trek* universe should be counterpoised against each other. Morality plays (which many *Star Trek* episodes typify) have to present a genuine moral choice, but at the same time, there is almost always a "right answer" that the characters can uncover and put into practice. Cinematic action must balance against realistic personalities.

This issue of balance is almost always the Narrator's responsibility. Some players will be willing to help out, especially with issues of tone or character balance. However, the player's first responsibility is to make her character as real and three-dimensional as possible; the Narrator is the one with the responsibility for the game as a whole. Of course, with great responsibility comes great power. The Narrator not only sets the stars in their courses, she populates the planets orbiting them. By her will, empires topple, civilizations choose peace or war, suns go nova and transporter circuits fuse irreparably. The ability to influence nearly every aspect of the universe goes a long way toward making balance easier. If the last run of episodes have been a little too introspective and talky, the Narrator can send the ship into a war zone or a tense border patrol. Using the NPCs to highlight aspects of character interaction that the players might not have developed can build balance for less-central characters — think of the convolutions the *Enterprise's* male-dominated Away Team went through on the matriarchal planet Angel One. The Narrator can use every element of the episode to nudge the game toward the happy medium, the strong center where great roleplaying games work best.



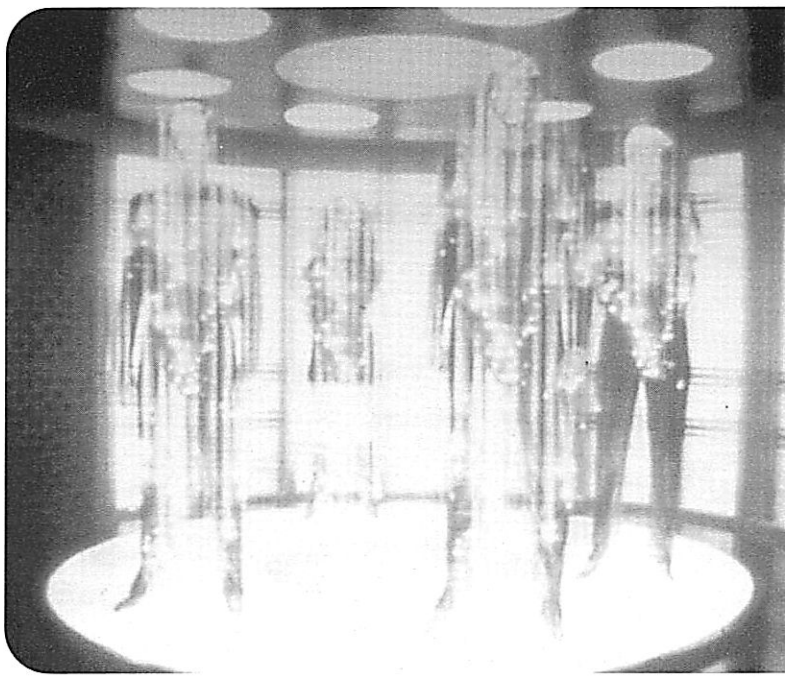
Of course, the Narrator should take care not to abuse her power, or to fear using it when the game needs decision and conflict. Players really hate games where no idea, no matter how ingenious or dramatic, has a chance of working if the Narrator didn't think of it first. No player enjoys seeing a squadron of Borg cubes materialize and obliterate their ship for no reason, even if the Narrator scrupulously observes the rules while doing so. Players don't enjoy being puppets for the Narrator's amusement, even if the puppet show is well-written and well-told. As odd as it may seem, the converse is also true. Players don't actually enjoy games where their characters never face any real opposition, always get their way in conflicts or confrontations and bend the rules to suit any momentary whim. These games become sterile exercises in racking up latinum or notching kills on phaser handles — they're not *Star Trek*, and they're not much fun, either. To make the game work, the Narrator has to walk a tightrope between letting the players get away with anything and crushing player initiative with overwhelming opposition or arbitrary rulings.

The key to keeping the game balanced and keeping it both fun and challenging lies in two basic concepts. First, the *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG*, like all roleplaying games, is a collaborative, cooperative effort. As Narrator, always remember that your primary goal is to entertain everybody; for all the players and the Narrator to have fun experiencing the story. Roleplaying games are interactive for a reason: the players contribute powerfully focused personalities and ingenuity to the story just as the Narrator contributes the initial story line and final

Narration. Use that interactivity; draw the players into the process of telling the story and experiencing the twists of the plot, both the twists the Narrator builds in and those that arise from player creativity or the unexpected combination of both. Players who care about the game as a game, consider it fun, and value the time they spend there will actively work to help the Narrator keep the story on track, well-balanced and interesting. Narrators should never fall into the trap of setting up opposition for the characters to teach the players a lesson, or to demonstrate the Narrator's cleverness and power. The opposition exists because no story exists without conflict, not as part of the "Narrator's team" in some game of cosmic football. If the players sense that the Narrator is working to tell an enjoyable story for everybody with everybody, then they will also step up to the challenge and look beyond their character's individual selfish interests to the interests of the character group, the ship, the Federation and the story.

The second key concept is to remember that the *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* is about roleplaying in the *Star Trek* universe. This universe can serve as the backdrop for thousands of stories and millions of characters, but the patterns laid down by the series and movies give valuable guidelines for Narrators and players alike, especially new ones. If you can't see your story happening in *Star Trek* without some wrenching changes to the theme or characters, that's a warning that it can potentially upset that delicate balance on which the game depends for success. Keep the story true to its universe, and the players will accept it and follow along. If it jars or seems out of place, players will be uncomfortable even if they can't put their fingers on why. This shouldn't be too restrictive, and Narrators should never worry too much about exactly replicating any single aspect of the series or movies. Keeping the flavor and themes is enough to keep the game on target and on track.

With that said, of course, in the final analysis the Narrator must be the final arbiter of what is and is not part of the game. If the Narrator rules that transporter patterns can't be stored for more than an hour, that the Andorians have left the Federation or even that phasers can't penetrate steel armor, that's the way it is for her individual series. As long as it makes a good and exciting game, nobody should have any reason to complain.



Telling A Story

Show, Don't Tell

To grab the attention and assure the active participation of the players, don't just tell a story. Show them the story taking place all around them. Inexperienced Narrators, novelists and scriptwriters often make the mistake of over-explaining, giving away all the interest and juice in the story. With experience, simply describing the situation allows a storyteller to more vividly paint the scene and also provides many more visceral clues and points of interest for the players or audience.

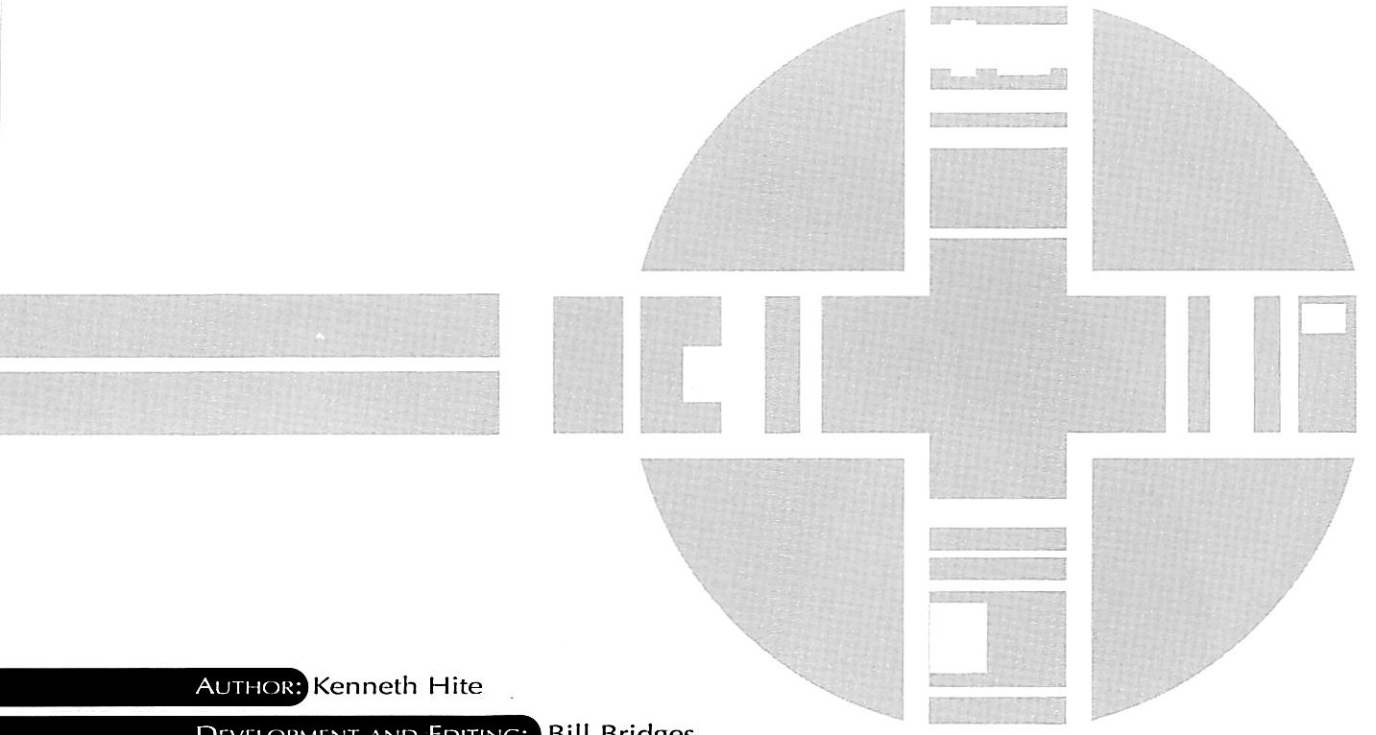
For example, consider two ways of presenting the same scene, say, a Klingon admiral visiting the bridge of the Crews' starship. The point of the scene is to establish that this admiral doesn't much like the Crew or Starfleet; he's being set up as an unfriendly character in the episode, perhaps an antagonist or a reluctant protagonist. The bare narrative, "tell-only" method might go like this:

Narrator: "The Klingon Admiral enters the bridge and the Captain talks to him. He's arrogant, and while you go about your business, he just watches you as he walks

STAR TREK®
THE NEXT GENERATION™

ROLE PLAYING GAME

NARRATOR'S TOOLKIT



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Author's Dedication: To Sheila for support, to Gene Coon and James T. Kirk for inspiration, and to Ross Isaacs and Christian Moore for the job in the first place.

Disclaimer: While Last Unicorn Games has researched extensively to make this the most authentic STAR TREK®: THE NEXT GENERATION™ roleplaying game possible, the depth of information necessary for a fully-realized roleplaying game is not always revealed during a weekly television show. While we have tried to extrapolate logically within the flavor of ST: TNG, some liberties have been taken and players should remember that only the events, characters and places that appear on the show or in films are canon.

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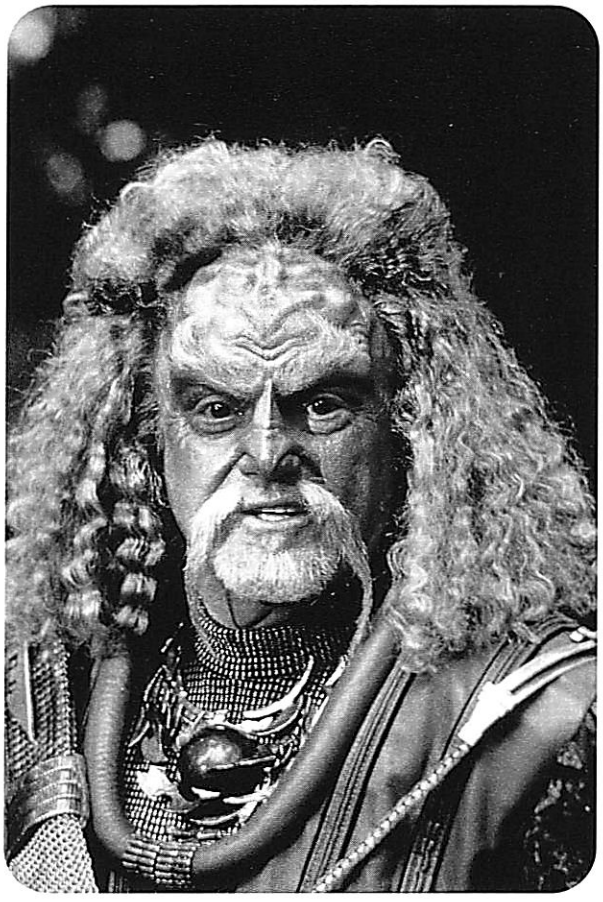




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around. You can tell that he doesn't think very highly of your ship."

That gets the point across, but it doesn't do much of anything else. It just sort of states facts baldly, leaving no role for players to interpret and no action for them to react to. As told, it's bare of drama; the scene is over, in fact, before it has even begun. Now here's how it might go with an emphasis on "showing" over "telling":

Narrator: "The Klingon Admiral struts onto the bridge, looks around him and narrows his eyes. He stands with his hands on his hips as the captain approaches. The captain greets him warmly, offering him the hospitality of the ship; the Klingon's only response is a stiff nod and a curtly formal thanks. As you go about your business, he imperiously surveys the activity, occasionally striding from station to station staring equally coldly at the crew and the equipment. An occasional grunt or snort escapes him, and once he shakes his head in slow disapproval. The captain finally breaks the silence, asking if the bridge meets with his approval. After a long moment, the Admiral responds: 'It's not a Klingon ship.'"

In the second example, there are a lot of actions that demonstrate how the Klingon feels; the players can deduce for themselves that the Klingon doesn't think very highly of their ship. It has more hints about the Klingon's basic personality and how he expresses it. It's dynamic, with vivid actions that establish the point of the scene without spelling it out in sterile voiceover. In every way, it's a superior scene. The scene has dramatic tension, ending with the captain's question.

This cardinal rule of storytelling holds even more strongly for interactive storytelling forms such as roleplaying games. In roleplaying games, anything that increases the player's involvement in the narrative should be encouraged. By showing the occurrence and allowing the players to determine its meaning and significance, the experienced Narrator makes the players part authors of the storytelling experience. Since they have taken ownership of the story by interpreting it, they care more about it than if they merely passively observed its unfolding. Better, then, than showing is convincing the players to look for themselves. Let's look at our scene now, as a truly roleplayed scene (assuming that the captain is an NPC):

Narrator: "The Klingon Admiral struts onto the bridge, looks around him and narrows his eyes. He stands with his hands on his hips as the captain approaches. The captain greets him warmly, offering him the hospitality of the ship; the Klingon's only response is a stiff nod and a curtly formal thanks."

[Pause]

First Player: "What's the Klingon doing now?"

Narrator: "After imperiously surveying the bridge, he's started striding from station to station, seemingly inspecting the crew and their equipment equally coldly. His measured paces eventually take him to your station."

[Pause]

First Player: "Is he saying anything?"

Narrator: "No, although you can hear him snort contemptuously at something." [Snorts]

First Player: "I'll just continue working like he isn't there."

Narrator: [Grunts] "He abruptly seems to lose interest in you and moves on to the Conn."

Second Player: "Uh, that's my station. I'll demonstrate the new nav computer to him."

Narrator: "He follows your demonstration with an air of patience."

[Pause]

Second Player: "Does he say anything about it?"

Narrator: [Head shake of slow disapproval]

[Pause]

First Player: "So, Admiral, does the bridge pass inspection?"

Narrator [as Klingon]: [Pause] "It's... [condescendingly] not a Klingon ship."

The key to presenting the scene this way is to open it up for the characters to interact with. That final put-down becomes much more effective when the Narrator delivers it to one of the players rather than to the captain. Now, it's personal. The players feel like they've personally influenced the scene; they've invested part of their character's personality in the scene's outcome and in the Klingon's personality. The pauses not only give atmosphere to the Klingon's contempt, they also open up the floor to the players for their contribution. Obviously, if the players don't ask questions or interact with the Klingon, the Narrator can simply continue to "show" the scene to the players rather than force them to engage in it. However, very few players can resist the temptation to become part of the story. Similarly, if no player sets the Narrator up for the Klingon's last, condescending remark, the Narrator can have the captain or some other NPC ask the question and then deliver the Klingon's answer. But at every point in the scene, the Narrator should give the players an opportunity to show themselves what is going on rather than simply telling them, or even showing it to them.

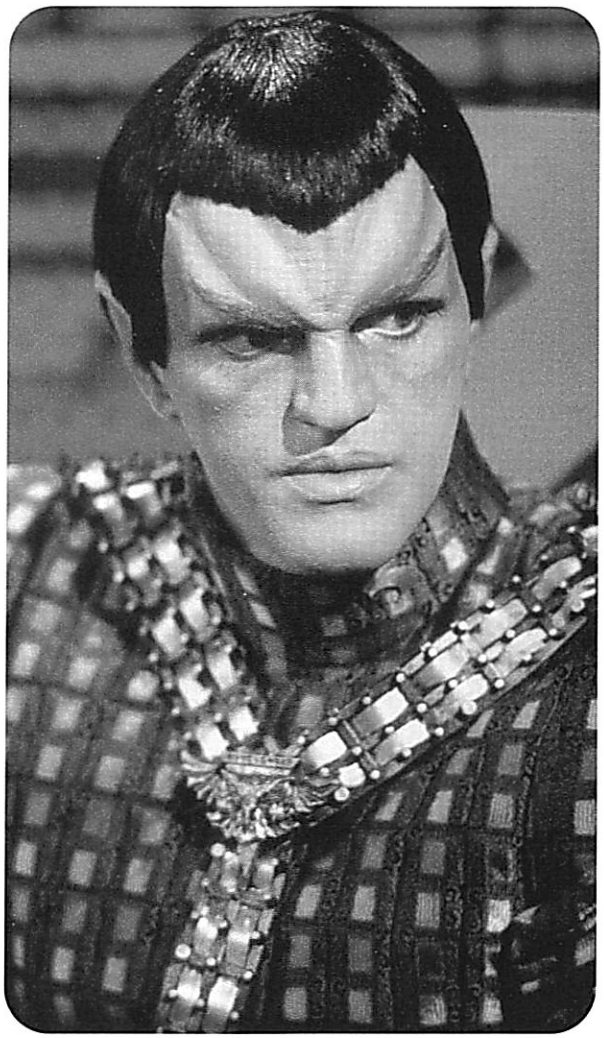
Scenes And Problem Solving

The other common mistake many novice Narrators make is to get so caught up in some detail of the setting or loose end of roleplaying that they lose track of the point of the scene. Each scene has a job to do; it has to convey some piece of information to the players or it has to advance the plot toward the episode's conclusion. The Narrator needs to remember why she put the scene in the episode in the first place and make sure that purpose gets accomplished. Don't hurry the players from scene to scene like tourists on a cheap package tour of Paris, of course; scenes and episodes need to develop at a natural rhythm to keep them seeming dramatically valid and realistic to the players (see *Pacing*, p. 18). But don't forget that the scene has a point, whether that is to demonstrate a Klingon admiral's bad attitude, present an essential clue to some interstellar enigma or to stage a conflict (fistfight or verbal duel) between the Crew and some nemesis.

Most scenes exist to further the plot of that particular episode. Introductory scenes set up the initial conflicts between the player characters and their antagonists: they meet the haughty Klingon, they beam down to the mysterious colony planet, they encounter a form of energy never before seen. Confrontational scenes continue these conflicts, with each scene building on the results of the one before it. These scenes lead to the climactic scene, where the Crewmembers (usually) triumph over their opponents. Finally, scenes of resolution provide closure to the main story line, reestablish "normalcy" and sometimes set up the next episode.

Every scene should draw the characters in by posing an immediate question: "What's going on here?" "Why doesn't that Klingon Admiral like us?" "What is causing the warp decay?" "Who's on those spaceships?" "How will our science officer and security officer decide to handle these aliens?" "Can we beat up those Cardassians?" The point of the scene is to answer that question — ideally by letting the players show themselves the answers, rather than having the Narrator show them directly. That answer should, ideally, lead into the next question, and the next scene.

Some scenes don't directly further the plot or even present information needed to further the plot of the episode. These seemingly useless encounters can exist to allow the players to deepen or embellish their characters' personalities and relationships (with each other and with the NPCs), for instance. Others might simply work to blow off some steam with a quick fight that doesn't actually accomplish much besides sparking everyone's adrenaline. Still others introduce plot points for future episodes, or provide a little comic relief. These extra scenes provide the valuable function of keeping the players from feeling overscripted, or "railroaded" into a certain conclusion. One of these incremental scenes can go a long way to building characters in the minds of the players; Data's byplay with Spot seldom advanced the plot of any *Star Trek: The Next*



Generation episode very much, but it was important for understanding Data's character.

It's important for the Narrator not to reveal that a filler scene is extraneous to the main plot, of course. Narrate that scene just as you would any other; don't betray any surprises about the direction of the plot too early, or that overscripted feeling comes back with a vengeance. Sometimes these stray scenes can even move the main story line of the episode along; the players will often surprise you with their ability to tie various plot strands together either thematically or directly.

Developing Believable Characters

The plot is hardly the only critical aspect of the story, or the game. Without believable and interesting characters to enact the plot and be affected by it, there is no story worth telling. The players' job involves building deep, interesting, believable, real protagonists — these are the player characters. The Narrator has to do the same with everyone else that the player characters will encounter or affect in the course of the episode. This can be a great tool for drawing the players into the adventure and making them show themselves what's going on. Scenery description can only go so far, but an NPC almost forces the players to directly address and comprehend the scene. Never let the player say "My character talks his way past the Romulan guards." Make him roleplay it, and roleplay those guards yourself. As a general rule, you should roleplay the NPCs as realistically and fully as you expect the players to roleplay their own characters. Stay in character and keep that character believable.

The key to a believable character lies in that character's motivation. The character's motivation must seem realistic and understandable, whether it's a Vulcan scientist, a Cardassian spymaster, an alien priest, a holographic entity gone amok, a collective energy hive-mind the size of a nebula or a microscopic silicon being. In many episodes, understanding the motivations of the other characters is the central theme of the story or the solution to the crisis. Once they understand that a seemingly parasitical space entity in the Alpha Omicron system is motivated by its childlike "imprinting" on the ship, or that Senator Pardek is motivated by ambition to advance in the Romulan government, they have the keys to a possible solution of the episode's conflict.

To provide a character with a sensible motivation, put yourself in their boots, sandals or flippers. If you were the autocrat of a medieval society, what would you want? How would you react to strangers with seemingly-magical powers appearing in the town square? Think about real people, either in your personal experience, the news or from history; what do they want? How would your boss handle a Starfleet desk command? How would Bruce Springsteen react to being thawed from cryogenic sleep? How would Alexander the Great lead the Romulan Empire? Failing that, take characters from classics of literature and drama; Shakespeare alone gives you hundreds of realistically-drawn characters that *Star Trek* has recast many, many times. Rewrite Macbeth as ambitious planetary boss, Hamlet as an indecisive Bolian diplomat, or Juliet as determined Betazoid stowaway. Recast the characters from *Star Trek: The Next*

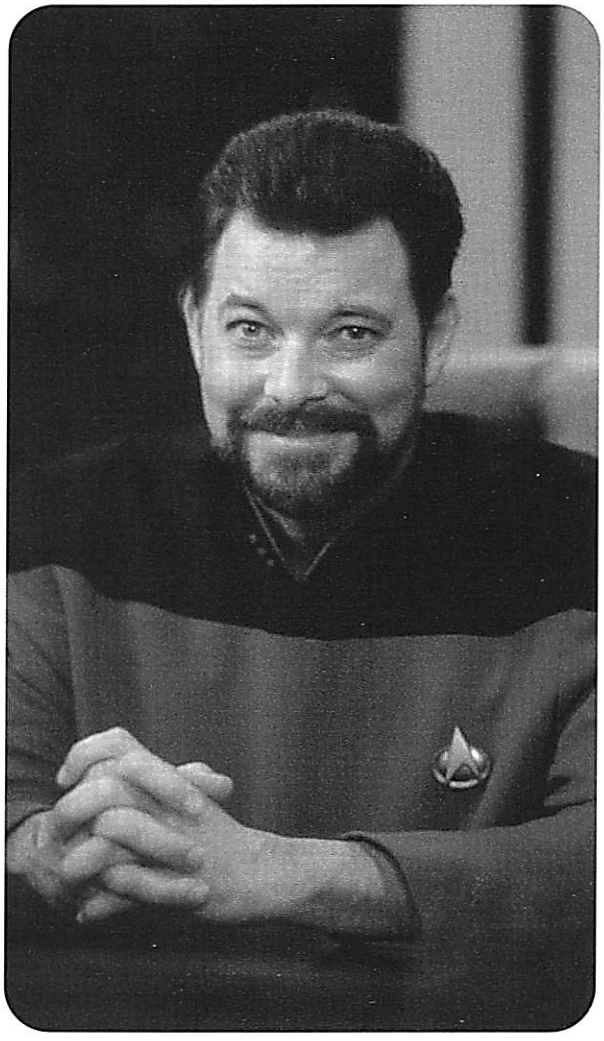
Generation episodes; give a Romulan ambassador the forceful, gregarious personality of Riker, for example.

The most important characters need the most detailed and believable motivations, and the most important characters in *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* episodes are often the villains. Villains aren't just motivated by some free-floating desire to do evil. No villain ever thinks he's a villain; he's defending his homeland, getting revenge for some personal or cultural offense, fighting for his survival, making money, gathering personal power, fulfilling God's will, making his parents proud of him, practicing a trade he enjoys, purifying the Galaxy or some combination of these motives. Don't stop at just one answer, either. If the Cardassian captain is defending his homeland, why is he doing it? Is he genuinely patriotic? A gifted space tactician who simply has found his purpose in life by commanding attacks? Does he see himself as protecting his aged parents or his younger sister? Is he defending it for the generous Cardassian Fleet pension plan? You can keep asking the question "Why?" about each answer. With every iteration, with every examination of the motives behind the motives, your Cardassian captain becomes more and more realistic.

Answering other questions about motivation besides "Why?" can also add vital dimension to the character. When does the Cardassian captain defend his homeland? At every opportunity, taking the fight to the enemy? Only when he sees the Union in danger? Only when his home world is directly threatened? Only long enough to get out of the military and work for the greater good in the Detapa Council? How does the Cardassian captain defend the homeland? With total ferocity, to make sure that no threat can emerge from the ruins? With minimal force, to avoid squandering precious resources? Subtly, so that the Union's enemies cannot track him? Proudly, to strike fear into their hearts at his boldness? Other questions will occur as you answer these: Who is expendable to him? What does the homeland symbolize to him? Start asking "Why?" again once you're done: Why does he defend subtly? Perhaps he was trained by a master in the Obsidian Order. Why does he strike boldly? Perhaps he is an admirer of the human Admiral Kirk, much as Patton admired Rommel.

Minor characters don't need quite that much depth; their motivation might merely be to get rid of these "annoying" Starfleet officers and get on with their comfortable normal life. Or to do a good job while their supervisor is watching. Or to support the main NPC and advance their own position thereby. You won't be able to give a unique motivation to every member of the Klingon Away Team, much less the entire Klingon Empire. Nevertheless, they should be as realistic as possible given the circumstances. Don't pass up an opportunity to individualize them if the player characters interact with them; if every Klingon guard reacts exactly the same, your game moves from a realistic cultural trend into a boring stereotype.

Finally, make sure that the story line still makes sense given the character's motivation, and vice versa. Plot and character should not compete or operate counter to one another; they are mutually reinforcing concepts in building a coherent and intelligible story. Often, Narrators find their NPCs "taking over





the story" and pursuing their own goals independent of conscious design. This is a good sign; it means that the NPC has become more real and less like a cardboard cutout on a preprogrammed obstacle course. Follow those NPC goals; realistic character motivation leads to realistic character action — and character action is practically the definition of plot.

Structure

The best story structures work like the skeleton of a human body: you should always have one but never see it. It should flow beneath the surface of the story, keeping everything in shape and standing upright but not become obvious to the characters. Stories only become narratives when they have structure. Without a structure, a story disintegrates into an aimless recitation of events. This is a tough balancing act; it's nearly impossible to teach it, and the only way to learn it is with observation and practice. Watch a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode you enjoy and apply the Three-Act Model (see p. 171 of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* rule book) as you watch. Try to spot the introduction, the confrontation, the climax at the peak of the confrontation and the resolution. Dissect it and figure out why it moved the way it did. What decisions did the scriptwriter make to move the story along? Where in the plot is new information introduced? How do character interactions function; what plot elements work to build character and vice versa? Look for subplots and how they recapitulate the Three-Act Model in miniature. You can do the same thing with any good story or drama, but *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episodes have the advantage of already being true to the axioms of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* universe and being only an hour long, so that you can watch more of them and more easily spot the elements of the structure.

Narrators glean another useful clue to roleplaying game structure just by watching their players. If the players look bored, there are too many empty scenes not pulling their weight in the episode. If they don't know what to do or who the enemy is or what problem they should be working on, the Narrator hasn't signposted the episode's structure well enough. On the other hand, if they rapidly rush through the scenes without thought or interest, that may be a sign that the structure is too obvious. By watching your players and tuning your episode structure to their playing style, you can produce *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* episodes that are just right for your gaming group.

One incredibly useful method for both learning structure and putting it into your games is the index card method. The index card technique is also used by television and movie scriptwriters to find plot weaknesses and to time scenes. This method was used, for example, by David Gerrold when he wrote the script and story for the original series *Star Trek* episode "The Trouble With Tribbles." It gives a good graphic sense of how much attention you're giving each plot line, each NPC. By laying out each scene on its own index card you can interleave important subplots, set up future story arcs and really build a realistically, and dramatically, satisfying narrative for your episode. You can also spot weak points in your episode and strengthen them strategically. Finally, the cards make ideal Narrator's notes, reminding you of exactly what's important about a given scene. As an example, we'll build an episode out of our two previous examples: the arrogant Klingon admiral and the bold Cardassian captain. Here are the two story lines that together will make up our episode's main structure.

- K'tavv, an arrogant Klingon admiral, gains grudging respect for Starfleet, and specifically for the Crew.

• Gul Tilak, a bold Cardassian captain, strikes a Federation starship with an important Klingon on board to destabilize the Federation-Klingon alliance.

Now let's put some story flesh on these bare bones of plot using the index card method. The cards should have the scene number and type, briefly explain the point of the scene and give the setting and any important NPCs that need to be there. Notes on the card should mention any vital clues, brilliant pieces of dialogue or anything else you feel that you should remember when narrating the scene. To begin with, let's set down the minimally necessary elements for the key plot lines for our story. For the purposes of this example, the player characters are all senior officers on the Federation starship *U.S.S. Argonne,* under the command of the NPC Captain Trevor.

Here's what the three acts of the Klingon plot line look like...

K1: INTRODUCTION
KLINGON ADMIRAL SHOWS CONTEMPT FOR STARFLEET AND CREW
NPCS: KLINGON ADMIRAL K'TAVV, CAPTAIN TREVOR
SETTING: BRIDGE of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: K'TAVV says: "It's not a Klingon ship" as a putdown.

K2: CONFRONTATION
KLINGON ADMIRAL DEMANDS A ROLE IN EMERGENCY PLANNING
NPCS: K'TAVV
SETTING: READY ROOM or CONFERENCE ROOM of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: K'TAVV is genuinely concerned for the ship's safety; his honor will not let him abandon a helpless ally, even a human one.

K3: CLIMAX
KLINGON ADMIRAL ATTEMPTS TO ASSUME CONTROL OF SHIP IN A CRISIS
NPCS: K'TAVV, HIS BODYGUARDS
SETTING: BRIDGE or AUXILIARY BRIDGE of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: K'TAVV hopes to preserve the Crew's honor by presenting them with a fait accompli. However, he will not cause the Crew to lose honor by forcing them to back down if they show courage.

K4: RESOLUTION
THE CREW'S RESISTANCE CREATES GRUDGING ADMIRATION IN KLINGON ADMIRAL
NPCS: K'TAVV, HIS BODYGUARDS
SETTING: ANY, but probably the BRIDGE of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: K'TAVV says: "You would not disgrace a Klingon ship" as he prepares to depart; ideally to the Crewmember he put down in K1.

Now, the Cardassian plot line...

C1: INTRODUCTION
CARDASSIAN POTENTIAL THREAT ESTABLISHED
NPCS: STARFLEET ADMIRAL PARIS (on viewscreen), CAPTAIN TREVOR
SETTING: BRIDGE, READY ROOM, or CONFERENCE ROOM of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: PARIS briefs TREVOR and his staff (including Crew). Federation freighters disappearing in remote sector: Starfleet thinks Cardassians may be sponsoring pirates.

C2: CONFRONTATION
SNEAK ATTACK ON ARGONNE WOUNDS CAPTAIN TREVOR, LEAVING CREW IN COMMAND.
NPCS: CAPTAIN TREVOR
SETTING: BRIDGE or other BATTLE STATIONS on the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: The highest-ranking Crewmember is in command of the ship.

C3: CLIMAX
ARGONNE BATTLES CARDASSIAN SHIP
NPCS: No vital ones.
SETTING: BRIDGE or other BATTLE STATIONS on the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: Crew's ingenuity, bravery, tactical skill, etc. should be the key to this battle; if they don't try, the *ARGONNE* is defeated. Encourage them to try.

C4: RESOLUTION
CRIPPLED, THE CARDASSIAN SHIP WARPS OUT OF SYSTEM
NPCS: TREVOR (recovered).
SETTING: BRIDGE on the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: Ideally, the Cardassian ship escapes with its life since GUL TILAK makes an excellent recurring villain.

Combining these two plot lines, a fully-developed episode begins to emerge. Scene C1 seems most like the "teaser" of a *Star Trek* episode, so it comes first. If Admiral Paris' briefing mentions that Admiral K'tavv will be paying a courtesy visit to the ship for this cruise (to demonstrate to the Klingons that the Federation takes the Cardassian threat seriously), scene C1 will lead right into K1. Since C2 leads right into K3 (Trevor's wounding spurs K'tavv to emergency action), K2 should immediately follow K1 and precede C2. K3 and C3 should occur as close together as possible. They might both occur simultaneously on the bridge, or the Crew might be distracted just before the battle is joined by K'tavv's coup attempt. The defeat of the Cardassian ship in C4 sets up K'tavv's respectful closer in K4, and the episode is completed.

Or is it? Some important questions remain; how does the Cardassian manage a successful sneak attack on a forewarned Federation starship? And what emergency turns K'tavv

from a disinterested and contemptuous observer (K1) to someone agitating for a role in planning (K2)? Obviously, something needs to weaken the *Argonne*, and if that something sets up an emergency, so much the better. The Narrator could just add an extra Cardassian attack (C1A) in between K1 and K2 to fill that role, but that still leaves the first question unanswered.

Instead, let's add a familiar, but unrelated subplot: a peculiar pulsar that damages starship engines and weakens the *Argonne* at a critical moment. Here's that subplot in index card form...

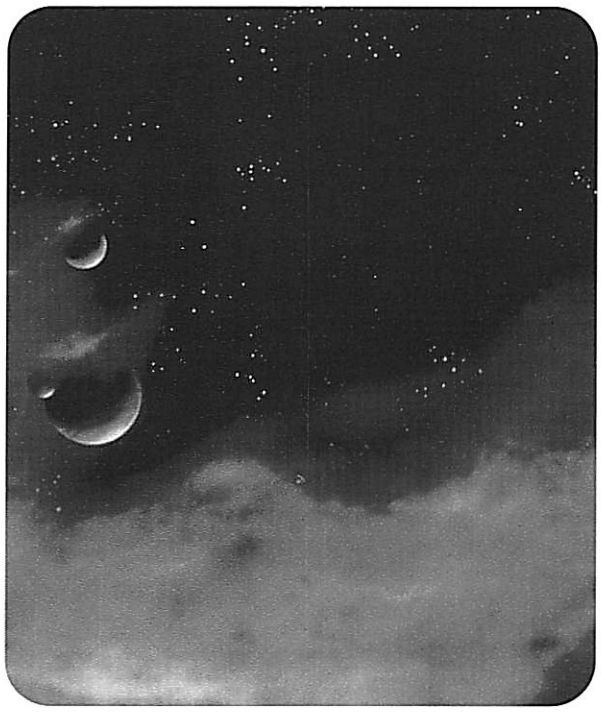
S1: INTRODUCTION
PECULIAR PULSAR IN THIS SECTOR EMITS STRANGE ENERGIES
NPCS: None, unless the SCIENCE OFFICER is an NPC
SETTING: BRIDGE or SENSOR LAB of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: Energies have a "peculiar wave form"; a successful Shipboard Systems (Sensors) Skill Test (Difficulty 6) by a Crewmember notes that it is harmonic with the crystalline structure of dilithium.

S2: CONFRONTATION
ENGINES BEGIN TO LOSE POWER
NPCS: None, unless the CHIEF ENGINEER is an NPC
SETTING: ENGINE ROOM or BRIDGE of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: A Crewmember Propulsion Engineering (Any Specialization) or Space Science (Astrophysics) skill roll (Difficulty 6) should determine that engine power loss correlates with pulsar energy flux.

S3: CLIMAX
PULSAR RADIATION MUST BE STOPPED
NPCS: Technical personnel of some sort, as S2
SETTING: ENGINE ROOM, JEFFRIES TUBE or BRIDGE of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: Crew might try recalibrating shield frequencies to block pulsar radiation, firing torpedoes into pulsar to throw rhythm off, moving behind an asteroid or planet to block pulsar radiation, etc. Any reasonable or reasonable-sounding plan should work; this is only a subplot, after all.

S4: RESOLUTION
PULSAR PROBLEM SOLVED, NEW DILITHIUM CRYSTALS BROUGHT ON LINE
NPCS: As S2 or S3
SETTING: BRIDGE or ENGINE ROOM of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: *ARGONNE* restored to full functioning, problem prevented from reoccurring.

Now bring it all together. Add S1 right before K1, and S2 right after. Now S2 leads into K2, which leads into C2: the Cardassian captain attacks when the engines are at their lowest point, triggering scene K3. Since the engines have to be fixed before the final battle, S3 should immediately precede C3. More experienced or adventurous Narrators can run scenes K3, S3 and C3 simultaneously, "jump



cutting" from the executive officer on the bridge battling the Cardassians to the security officer at the battle bridge facing down K'tavv to the chief engineer in the engine room desperately recalibrating the shield frequencies. S4 then leads to C4 and the defeat of the Cardassian, and K4 closes out the episode as before.

Let's tune the episode one more time. The drama would be more exciting, and the story more convincing, if the Cardassians and the pulsar were connected in some way rather than random chance. What if the Cardassians have some sort of energy projector on a hidden asteroid orbiting the pulsar that triggers those dilithium-destroying waves? Suddenly the first two acts fall into place: our canny Cardassian has used this subtle weapon to attack Federation shipping in hopes of luring a suitable target into a perfect ambush. The Notes section of some of the cards need to be changed, or expanded, to reflect the unified story line, but that will take very little time or effort. Add a hint for a future story arc, a possible scene for some character development (perhaps building up Gul Tilak a little more firmly), and suddenly you have a full-fledged *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* episode.

Here's what the final card array looks like...

C1/K0: INTRODUCTION
CARDASSIAN POTENTIAL THREAT ESTABLISHED, K'TAVV MENTIONED
NPCS: STARFLEET ADMIRAL PARIS (on viewscreen), CAPTAIN TREVOR
SETTING: BRIDGE, READY ROOM, or CONFERENCE ROOM of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: PARIS briefs TREVOR and his staff (including Crew). Federation freighters disappearing in remote Sagitta 12 sector: Starfleet thinks Cardassians may be sponsoring pirates. PARIS mentions that the *ARGONNE* will rendezvous with a Klingon ship en route to pick up Admiral K'TAVV, a high Klingon dignitary.

K0A: INTRODUCTION
RENDEZVOUS
NOTES: In the TV show, this would just be a quick shot of the *ARGONNE* and the Klingon ship matching orbit; if the episode pacing warrants it, a simple message that "Admiral K'TAVV has beamed aboard, sir." can precede Narration of "You warp out to Sagitta 12."

S1: INTRODUCTION
PECULIAR PULSAR IN THIS SECTOR EMITS STRANGE ENERGIES
NPCS: None, unless the SCIENCE OFFICER is an NPC
SETTING: BRIDGE or SENSOR LAB of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: Energies have a "peculiar wave form"; a successful Shipboard Systems (Sensors) skill roll (Difficulty 6) by a Crewmember notes that it is harmonic with the crystal structure of dilithium. Incredible success, or a Crewmember specifically announcing a search, will detect an asteroid orbiting the pulsar gravitationally locked on its far side, away from the *ARGONNE*. Cardassian ship is too well concealed to be spotted now under any circumstances.

K1: INTRODUCTION
KLINGON ADMIRAL SHOWS CONTEMPT FOR STARFLEET AND CREW
NPCS: KLINGON ADMIRAL K'TAVV, CAPTAIN TREVOR
SETTING: BRIDGE of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: K'TAVV says: "It's not a Klingon ship" as a putdown and leaves the BRIDGE.

K1A: CONFRONTATION
KLINGON BODYGUARD SURPRISED NEAR MAIN COMPUTER CORE
NPC: KLINGON BODYGUARD
SETTING: MAIN COMPUTER ACCESSWAY on the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: This scene actually exists to set up a future episode arc about Klingon computer espionage and an attempt by a renegade faction to sabotage the Federation's computer network. For this episode, it merely serves to raise Klingon-Federation tensions and give a seemingly logical reason for the ease with which K'TAVV will be able to seize control in scene K3. If the Crew runs a diagnostic, they will uncover the control codes that K'TAVV will use, but not the second "Trojan Horse" codes that set up the future arc.

S2: CONFRONTATION
ENGINES BEGIN TO LOSE POWER
NPCS: None, unless the CHIEF ENGINEER is an NPC
SETTING: ENGINE ROOM or BRIDGE of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: A Crewmember Propulsion Engineering (Any Specialization) or Space Science (Astrophysics) skill roll (Difficulty 6) should determine that engine power loss correlates with pulsar energy flux. At this time, detecting an energy pulse between the asteroid and the pulsar might be possible, again with a specific Crewmember search.

K2: CONFRONTATION
KLINGON ADMIRAL DEMANDS A ROLE IN EMERGENCY PLANNING
NPCS: K'TAVV
SETTING: READY ROOM or CONFERENCE ROOM of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: K'TAVV is genuinely concerned for the ship's safety; his honor will not let him abandon a seemingly helpless ally, even an incompetent human one. Reports of engine power loss can keep this meeting tense.

C2: CONFRONTATION
SNEAK ATTACK ON *ARGONNE* WOUNDS CAPTAIN TREVOR, LEAVING CREW IN COMMAND.
NPCS: CAPTAIN TREVOR
SETTING: BRIDGE or other BATTLE STATIONS on the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: The highest-ranking Crewmember is in command of the ship. Attack will reveal Cardassian ship; a successful Crewmember Shipboard Systems (Tactical or Sensors) skill roll (Difficulty 5) will note that the pulsar energies seem to match energies from the asteroid. Scan of the asteroid will reveal a power source and structures there. Phasers knocked out, other damage optional.

C2A: CONFRONTATION
CARDASSIAN CAPTAIN GIVES *ARGONNE* A CHANCE TO SURRENDER.
NPCS: Cardassian captain GUL TILAK (on viewscreen), K'TAVV
SETTING: BRIDGE of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: "Our sensors detect your power loss; surrender now and your crew will not freeze to death in space. You have one hour." Perhaps give GUL TILAK a speech pattern similar to that of Kirk, or mention his admiration for the Federation: "Because of my respect for the traditions of your Federation, I give you this chance. Your great Admiral Kirk would have done the same for a beaten foe." Mention of Kirk will make K'TAVV very angry; he's not a popular figure in some Klingon circles.

K3: CLIMAX
KLINGON ADMIRAL ATTEMPTS TO ASSUME CONTROL OF SHIP IN A CRISIS
NPCS: K'TAVV, HIS BODYGUARDS
SETTING: BRIDGE or AUXILIARY BRIDGE of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: K'TAVV hopes to preserve the Crew's honor by presenting them with a fait accompli. However, he will not cause the Crew to lose honor by forcing them to back down if they show courage. A Crewmember with an understanding of Klingon ways might allow K'TAVV to save face by proposing that K'TAVV and (some members of) the Crew beam onto the asteroid and seize the projector in "glorious physical combat," turning it on the Cardassians and saving the ship.

S3: CLIMAX
PULSAR RADIATION MUST BE STOPPED
NPCS: Technical personnel of some sort, as S2
SETTING: ENGINE ROOM, JEFFRIES TUBE or BRIDGE of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: Crew might try recalibrating shield frequencies to block pulsar radiation, etc. This is also a second chance for the Crew to think of beaming onto the asteroid. K'TAVV might drop a hint to that end if the Narrator wishes.

K3A/S3A/C2A: CLIMAX
K'TAVV AND THE CREW SEIZE THE LIGHTLY-DEFENDED ASTEROID IN A SURPRISE ATTACK
NPCS: K'TAVV, HIS BODYGUARDS, CARDASSIAN MILITIA
SETTING: CONTROL STATION on the ASTEROID
NOTES: This scene is optional; if the Crew don't think of it, don't force them. Beaming over means lowering the *ARGONNE*'s shields, though, so it's a real gamble with defeat. That's why K'TAVV likes it. Time the seizure of the asteroid for the critical moment of C3, if possible.

C3: CLIMAX
ARGONNE BATTLES CARDASSIAN SHIP
NPCS: No vital ones.
SETTING: BRIDGE or other BATTLE STATIONS on the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: Crew's ingenuity, bravery, tactical skill, etc. should be the key to this battle; if they don't try, the *ARGONNE* is defeated. Encourage them to try. If the Crew have not beamed onto the asteroid, a clever photon torpedo shot (by a Crewmember weapons officer) might use the pulsar's gravity to slingshot around and destroy it anyway. If they have beamed over, seizing the asteroid is the key to victory at the last minute.

S4: RESOLUTION
PULSAR PROBLEM SOLVED, NEW DILITHIUM CRYSTALS BROUGHT ON LINE
NPCS: As S2 or S3
SETTING: BRIDGE or ENGINE ROOM of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: *ARGONNE* restored to full functioning, problem prevented from reoccurring. Shields and weapons fully back on-line.

C4: RESOLUTION
CRIPPLED, THE CARDASSIAN SHIP WARPS OUT OF SYSTEM
NPCS: TREVOR (recovered).
SETTING: BRIDGE on the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: Ideally, the Cardassian ship escapes with its life since GUL TILAK makes an excellent recurring villain. He certainly doesn't fight to the death for an empty sector like Sagitta 12.

K4: RESOLUTION
THE CREW CREATE GRUDGING ADMIRATION IN KLINGON ADMIRAL
NPCS: K'TAVV, HIS BODYGUARDS
SETTING: ANY, but probably the BRIDGE of the *ARGONNE*
NOTES: K'TAVV says: "You would not disgrace a Klingon ship" as he prepares to depart; ideally speaking to the Crewmember he put down in K1.

Pacing

Keeping the story moving is the key to keeping it exciting and interesting. At the same time, rushing past the essential clues, hurrying the character interaction and skimping on setting description will leave the players baffled and apathetic. For the Narrator, pacing means keeping the action going without cheating the players of the full scope of the story or their character possibilities.

One essential element of pacing is timing the end of the scene. Once a scene has delivered its message, done its job by the story or made its point, it's time to cut to the next one. Rather than let the players continue to pester the Klingon Admiral, he leaves the bridge. Once it's obvious that the alien leader won't give the Away Team what they want, have him called away on urgent business (or have the Away Team escorted out of the palace) rather than sitting through an endless argument. A scene that ends too late loses its punch; it doesn't lead into the next scene any more and it's central point is in danger of being lost as the players get distracted by the additional dialogue or description.

Make sure that the scene goes on long enough for it to do its job, though. Ending the scene too early, while it doesn't lead to delays and sidetracks, can actually create other problems when you are trying to set up the climax. Players who don't feel that their characters have enough information, or that something is missing or hasn't been tried, won't be in a hurry to get to the dramatic showdown with the Breen. Rushing the players through a scene can cause much the same effect; make sure that the hook has sunk for at least some of the players before moving on to the next crisis or the next interaction.

Like structure, the Narrator can pick up cues on pacing by watching the players and playing off of them. If they dawdle and delay in a scene, or spend too much time aimlessly going nowhere, the pacing needs to be tightened and the scenes moved along a little faster. If the players seem confused and rushed, or keep asking "What was that first bit again?" perhaps the pacing is too rushed and the Narrator should spend more time building each scene's impact and allowing the players to interact with the story. Every group's idea of perfect pacing is different, and every episode requires a different pace to tell its story best, so the Narrator should always keep an eye on the pacing of the game and be ready to step it up or down as conditions warrant.



Presentation

It's important to remember that the Narrator has to present everything she wants the players to know about a scene or episode. The Narrator remains the sole source of information for the players, serving as their characters' eyes, ears, noses, psychic senses, tricorders and even more. The presentation of this information makes the difference between players feeling like part of the game and feeling like mere spectators for the Narrator's story. It makes the difference between a thematically and dramatically coherent and connected plot line and a series of murkily related encounters.

You don't have to drown the players in information; that can be as deadly to the feel of the game as failing to give them enough. Long descriptions can become ambiguous, and will often confuse players, causing them to lose the point of the scene before it has even begun. Try to share the crucial detail that triggers understanding and comprehension for the players. The better they understand their setting to begin with, the less work you need to do here. If they're on a Federation starship, simply announcing that the red alert is sounding will conjure up scenes of running crewmen, flashing red lights, howling sirens, etc. If they're on an alien planet or in some bizarre virtual reality holoscape, it will take a little bit more. However, it's still possible to

find one key fact that will open up the presentation and let everything else fall into place.

For NPCs, that's usually their species, their eyes (cold, warm, twinkly, sad) and their style of dress (ornate, harshly ascetic, bright, drab, none). With those two details, most players can jump to the correct conclusions about any NPC. Of course, if there's some other detail they need, be sure to mention it: "The richly-dressed Ktarian's cat-eyes twinkle as he holds a disruptor pointed at your midsection." For spaceships, the key details are period and nationality (antiquated Ferengi, top-line Imperial Klingon, old Earth) and the air (stifling, cold, fresh, sterile). For planets, rapidly comparing an unknown planet to some known planet will help give that vital first impression. Provide the comparison and its most significant difference in one line: "It's like the high desert on Vulcan, but colder." "It's like the Amazon rainforest on Earth, except that the leaves are blue."

That key detail should come as early as possible in the narration of the scene, and the Narrator should be ready to expand on it with answers to any player question. Later description can, if time or pacing allows, fill in other crucial details of the scene or interesting details of the setting or NPC. Remember to provide some input for the four major senses: sight, hearing, touch and smell. For characters with other senses, like Betazoids, or with some sort of technological sensors, like a VISOR or tricorder, make sure you've covered anything "obvious" early in the narration of that scene.

Keep a grip on your word choice: don't describe a temple floor as "dangerous" unless you want the players to spend some time having their characters search for traps and deadfalls; use "cracked and shifting." A poorly-chosen descriptor can derail the scene for some time, and the Narrator can never say "Forget about what I said, that was just description." If he does, then the players will tune out everything else that doesn't immediately sound important, and perhaps miss vital data later on. This is another good reason to keep notes on the scenes, especially for beginning Narrators.

Atmosphere

All of these elements — scenes, characters, motivation, story structure, pacing and presentation — compose the atmosphere of your game. Much like the atmosphere of a planet, it should be invisible but always make its presence felt. Without it, a planet or a game is a sterile rock. All of these things require some degree of balance, and an even greater degree of practice, from the Narrator. However, they all work together to support one another: realistic characters drive plot action, scene structure builds story structure, presentation creates pacing. You can't just extract one portion of the narrative atmosphere and say "this is the key portion," but if you make a mistake on one, you can use the others to compensate until you rectify the error and restore the game. Conversely, as you get more proficient at any one of these elements, you will find yourself with a better understanding of the others. The key to creating a narrative atmosphere, or a "narrative space" in which the game takes place and holds the players' attention and belief, lies in using all these techniques to reinforce rather than detract from one another. The axiom "show, don't tell, but better yet get them to show themselves" can work on any element of the narrative atmosphere. Use it, and as you use it for one purpose you will find that it becomes even better fitted for the others. With practice and observation, and a minimum of cooperation from your players, you will find yourself creating *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* episodes that seem just as "real" and just as much a part of the *Star Trek* universe as any television show. Better still, they will be your stories; yours and your friends'.

Types of Story

Leaving the "how" of narrating aside for the moment, the question of "what to narrate" occurs. Almost every type of story has a place in the *Star Trek* universe; it's a universe, after all, full of billions and trillions of beings each with their own lives and their own histories. But for the brave men, and women and androids of Starfleet, the stories need to shine a little brighter and mean a little more. Here are some classic *Star Trek: The Next Generation* story types...

Action

Action stories center on physical action and physical conflict. Whether it's a gladiatorial bout on Ligon II, a series of phaser ambushes and fistfights across the Taugan sector, or an epic space battle at Wolf 359, the pacing is typically quick and dramatic. A sports story (perhaps involving a planetary athletic contest, hunting party or similar activity) would also work as an action story. Security personnel and other characters with good physical and combat scores are likely to flourish and take center stage in action stories. Players don't have a lot of time to

make decisions, and any dialogue scenes are brief and tension-filled. Action is likely to play an important part of many *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* episodes, even if the episode is not specifically structured as an action story.

Narrators planning action stories need to come up with game statistics for the major NPCs and for any angry mobs, Cardassian militia teams, or Tarkassian Razor Beasts the characters will encounter. Similar advice applies to space-combat action stories; make sure that the enemy space ships are well defined enough to run combat with. Since many weapons in the *Star Trek* universe are so lethal, make sure there are plenty of nonlethal options for fight scenes, or at least weapons like *bat'leths* and *lirpas* that delay their lethality for one or two hits to build dramatic tension. Before the actual combat or action sequence, you can build atmosphere and anxiety with a nice, detailed description. Keep your narration choppy and to the point during the action itself, though; don't slow down a dramatic fight by flipping through the rule books or going into lengthy descriptions of irrelevant details. Be sure to describe the tactical situation of any combat scene clearly and efficiently. Since action stories often climax with the big fight, skimping on the description there will weaken the whole episode.



Exploration and Discovery

With stories of exploration and discovery, the plot hinges on some unknown interstellar object, life form, civilization, phenomenon or other target of investigation. Sometimes the unknown directly affects the ship, as with the Alpha Omicron system energy being or Nagilum of Morgana Quadrant. Other times, the mission of discovery involves the Crew visiting a new planet like Malcoria III or probing the enigma behind a new race like the Tamarians. Even voyages to "familiar" planets like the Klingon or Romulan homeworlds can serve as voyages of discovery for players who aren't familiar with them, of course. Science officers and diplomatic types tend to shine in stories of exploration. Exploration stories will draw out the confrontation act of the episode and compress the resolution; the drama is in the discovery that builds the confrontation. These episodes often involve some other theme or element; alien cultures that mirror elements of Earth culture often serve as allegories or morality plays, for example.

It is vital to describe the setting well and vividly enough that the players sense the drama of the exploration as a goal in itself. That also means that the setting or target should be genuinely interesting, new and exciting: the fifth or sixth omnipotent energy being testing humanity or planet based on the American South in the 1950s becomes a tedious exercise indeed. Pacing should be deliberate but not slow or turgid. Some Narrators can get away with more "travelogue" style episodes than others: some player groups genuinely enjoy lengthy (and well-presented) descriptions of alien vistas or bizarre cultures, but player tastes vary widely. Finally, try to make the climax of the exploration episode somehow relate to the planet being explored or to the new phenomenon being encountered: don't set up a planet that parallels Earth's Tokugawa Japan just to unveil a climax involving a space battle with the Romulans. In exploration stories, the setting should have a visible connection to the theme and to the NPCs, if possible.

Introspection

Introspective episodes involve the exploration and discovery of a character's inner space. Searching for feelings, identity, closure with the past and stable relationships with others

comprise a large part of the *Star Trek* universe of stories. Some characters practically embody the introspective quest: Data's lengthy investigation of what it means to be human, or Worf's explorations of his twin human and Klingon ancestries, are two of the best known. Even normal human characters can engage in voyages of personal exploration and discovery, as Picard does in the episodes "Family" and "Tapestry." A Satarran memory wipe or a bout of amnesia serves to show character interactions in a whole new light; these stories can prove quite interesting for players interested in exploring alternate versions of themselves. Alternate-self exploration is a major element in time travel (especially future travel) stories, mirror-universe stories and even holodeck stories in some cases. Any character, or all the characters, can engage in internal discovery in an introspective episode, although if the Crew contains a counselor, he will probably get some stage time here, too. Long dialogue scenes and lots of in-character roleplaying are called for in these episodes, so newer roleplayers might want to ease into them as subplots in other episodes to start with.

Often, NPCs such as Lwaxana Troi, Q, or Dr. Toby Russell serve to trigger these episodes by setting the story line in motion in a traumatic or dramatic (or just plain odd) introductory act. The Narrator should have his NPCs down cold, with as much motivation and background as any member of the Crew has. Any NPCs with potentially important reactions to the Crew member engaged in this introspective journey should be similarly realized. Without careful attention by the Narrator, introspective stories can continue for some time. Having an external event cause the introspection is one useful technique for keeping them limited to a single episode; with the end of the triggering event, the introspective story is complete, at least for now. More adventurous Narrators can simply set off the personal charge and then let the episode go wherever the players wish. Encourage the players to engage in dialogue between themselves. In the best introspective stories, not only the central character learns something about herself; her Crewmates discover part of themselves in how they react to her.

Mystery

The mystery episode is a specific subtype of exploration and discovery episodes. The central thread of a mystery story is finding the answer to one specific question, whether it is a formal puzzle of detection posed by a holographic Moriarty, the fate of a missing scientific colony or the nature of an alien library frozen in the head of a comet. In our example story, two mysteries are posed: The fate of the missing freighters in Sagitta 12, and the cause of the rapid dilithium decay. As you can tell from that example, many other types of story contain at least one mystery subplot, especially stories of exploration, espionage, horror and deadlines. Depending on the nature of the mystery, almost any type of character can be the one to solve the riddle and enjoy center stage for the climax. The best mystery episodes are those that require more than one type of character to unravel the whole answer: a scientific puzzle that requires an engineering solution, for example. Pacing needs to be slow enough for the players to gather clues and information. Plenty of scenes will center around investigation, information gathering and trying out various solutions to the plot.

Narrators should make sure that the plot is sufficiently confusing to be a proper mystery challenge, but not so incoherent as to be unsolvable. The best mystery episodes make perfect sense in hindsight. Players, who don't have the big picture, can look awfully obtuse when faced with a mystery plot. It's not their fault, it's the nature of the medium. Make sure there are plenty of clues in every scene. As a rule of thumb, you should write three clues for every scene where you expect the players to figure out one. Don't force-feed the clues to the players, though; the mystery episode can seem overscripted if the Narrator looks like he's doing all the observation and deduction. Along those same lines, keep red herrings to a minimum; one strong red-herring subplot is enough to provide a proper sense of twistiness and uncertainty. Ideally some event at the climax of the red herring subplot should point to the solution to the real mystery, just in case the players diligently follow all the wrong clues anyway.

Espionage

Stories of espionage are common in episodes pitting Starfleet against either of its major rivals like the Cardassians or the Romulans. Tales of political intrigue, defectors, internal subversion and high espionage usually have a more Romulan feel to them; stories of low espionage and brushfire confrontations often center on the Cardassians. That said, the Narrator is free to try a "change-up" episode with brutal Romulans and courtly and subtle Cardassians, if only to keep her players on their toes. Security characters will have a natural role in espionage episodes, of course, as will any part of the command staff. Espionage stories (and mystery episodes) can be made much more difficult if there are psychic characters like Betazoids or Vulcans in the Crew; the Narrator should rigorously enforce the limits on those races' telepathy wherever possible to keep these stories plausible and fun. The pacing and structure of

espionage episodes is similar to mystery stories, although espionage tales are often punctuated with action, especially at the climax. That makes an excellent relief valve for the tension and uncertainty of the episode's confrontational scenes and gives a nice sense of closure to these sorts of episodes while reinforcing *Star Trek* morality and individualism.

The same concerns for sufficient clues and twisting plots that become clear in retrospect hold in espionage as in mysteries. The attention to plot needed for a good mystery should be bolstered with properly suspicious and troublesome NPCs. People drawn to spying are eccentric and colorful folks in the 24th century as well as in our own; make sure you roleplay them that way. A lot of ornate NPC dialogue goes a long way toward bringing the NPC to life while at the same time leaving the players properly confused.

Suspense

Suspense stories are similar to mystery stories, but the question is usually the same each time: How will the Crew, or the ship, or one character, escape almost certain doom? Often, suspense is heavily flavored with action, if the Crew is dealing with terrorists springing ambushes in the ship's corridors. Here, the question of survival is spiced with a continuing worry about where and when the next attack will happen. The state of continuing worry and increasing tension is the key state for suspense episodes; these episodes will spend a lot of time, relatively, in the second, or confrontational, act of the story line. Alfred Hitchcock famously defined suspense as two men talking baseball with a bomb under the table. If the audience doesn't see the bomb before the explosion, it's just dialogue with a surprise ending. If the audience sees the bomb, the same scene is overwhelmingly suspenseful — that bomb could go off at any minute and here you are talking baseball! The *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode "Cause and Effect" achieves a similar effect by destroying the *Enterprise* in the introduction, and ambitious Narrators should look at that episode as an example of combining the flashback (flashforward?) with time travel for some ultimate suspense.

Narrators can create a similar effect by putting a vitally important, but dialogue-filled and detailed, scene in between setting up a deadly crisis and allowing the Crew to resolve it. While they desperately want to save the ship, the Crew has to placate an angry alien entity or deal with an inquisitive Q first. Suspense stories need a well-described and credible threat and a series of short, tension-filled scenes while the clock ticks down to destruction. A deceptively soft tone of voice that slowly grows more urgent, tightly controlled and forceful can go a long way toward building a sense of tension and suspense in the players; experiment with this kind of delivery for your best results.

Deadline

Whether it's La Forge in a deadly magnetic field, a cosmic string across the path of a helpless *Enterprise* or the dissolution of all space-time, something in *Star Trek* is always counting down the minutes to a disaster. The deadline makes a powerful component of the suspense story or a plot engine forcing the Crew to unravel some mystery before the star goes nova. However, the unthreatening deadline can also serve to concentrate any other kind of episode in time, a very useful way of keeping the story rich and moving fast. The ship is two days away from the diplomatic conference; until then the ambassadors interact. The beautiful young lieutenant will transfer off the ship next week; there are only a few precious hours to decide how the character feels about her. Setting a deadline may seem arbitrary, but in the *Star Trek* universe it's hardly unrealistic.

Roleplaying deadline scenarios requires and imposes a degree of Narrator control over the episode that some players may bridle at. Make sure that you don't constrain player action or Crew action in any way except the deadline: that should concentrate their mind eventually. However, do try to give a sense of elapsed time, if only by deceptively modulated announcements from the ship's computer: "Ten minutes to core failure." "Nine minutes, fifty seconds, to core failure." Less obviously (and annoyingly), just shorten the scenes as the deadline gets closer. Jump cuts (see p. 35) are an excellent way to do that while still letting the players work to solve things. Another technique to shorten perceived time involves cutting back on description as the episode progresses. Narration and description opens with lots of detail and effects, building a complete picture; that scene ends with the setting of the deadline. Every scene thereafter, use a little less description. As the scenes become more sparse, the only thing the players will focus on is the time remaining and their own actions.

Horror

Horror stories set out to frighten the Crew and by extension, hopefully, the players. They can be an interesting and oddly refreshing change of pace from typical *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* adventures. Horror may seem difficult, if not positively alien, in the brightly-lit corridors of Starfleet and the positive, peaceful Federation. Fitting horror

into the *Star Trek* universe can thus be a challenge. Each series has something of its own flavor; the original *Star Trek* series seemed to take its cue from the deliberately classical horrors summoned up by the witches of Pyris VII in episodes involving the salt vampire or the reincarnated Jack the Ripper; it aimed for traditional "fears of the unknown." These episodes might be the dark side of exploration stories: seeking the unknown is dangerous. Horror stories from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* feature fears of identity loss centering on the assimilating Borg, the conspiratorial alien parasites or the more subtle horror of an Ullian mind rapist. These episodes are the dark side of introspection stories: there might not be a real personality there to explore. Try to find the dark side of any story type, and you've found the possibilities for horror.



Narrating horror can be as much of a challenge as fitting it into the universe. Even more than normal roleplaying, horror roleplaying requires cooperation from players and Narrator alike to build an atmosphere of terror. Horror episodes work on the principle of tension-and-release. Tense, suspenseful scenes of investigating a murder scene or moving slowly through a darkened cavern alternate with short scenes of furious action or hurried analysis. The climax is the confrontation between the Crew and the horror, whatever it is. Keep the descriptions scary, the NPCs creepy and disturbing, and the plot uncertain. As long as the players don't know exactly what they face, they will collaborate in scaring themselves by imagining something truly awful. Very seldom does the actual horror live up to their fevered thoughts, so keep it in the dark as much as possible. Any break in the mood is fatal to the atmosphere of fear; don't slack off on descriptions or give cardboard motivations to the NPCs and monsters. If the players don't believe in the story, they won't be scared by it.

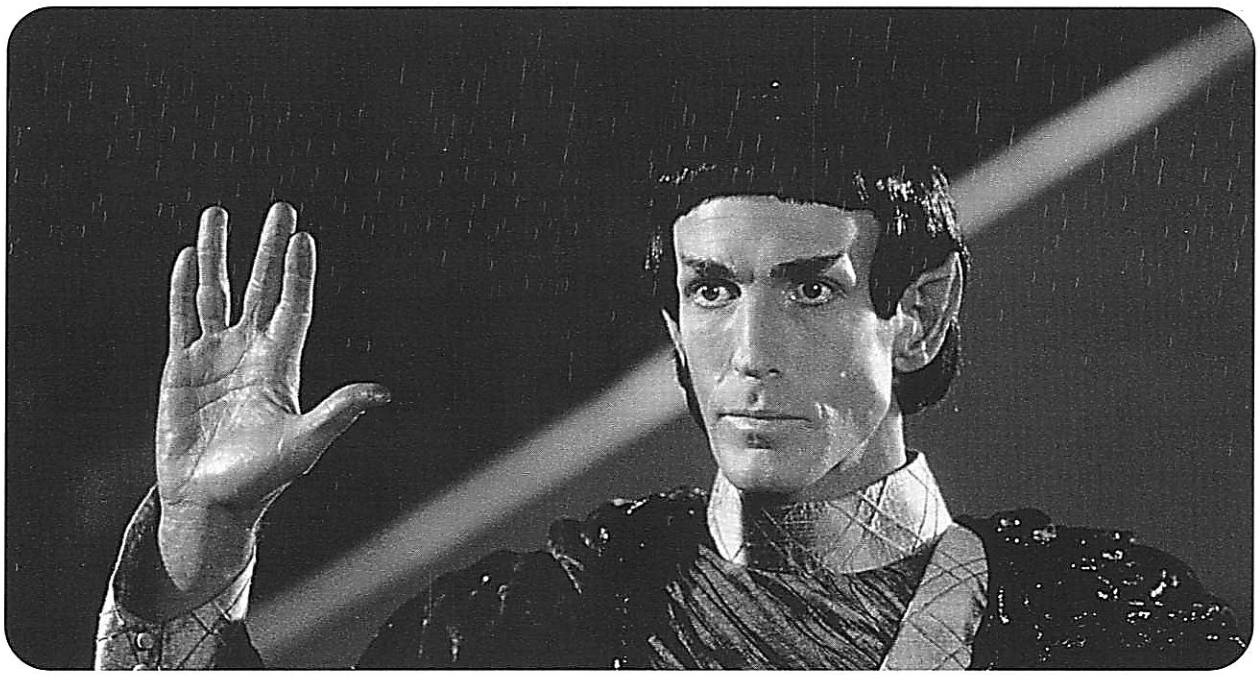
Morality Play

The morality play is a type of episode centering on the conflict between two moral principles (order and freedom, or love and duty), or less often and less interestingly, the explication of the superiority of a single moral principle (peace over aggression, tolerance over hatred). The courtroom dramas of Picard's "The Drumhead" or Data's "The Measure of Man" make excellent springboards for morality plays. The best morality plays, like introspective stories, concentrate on character development and the reaction of the Crew to some contrast of ethical principle. The worst of them point to some cardboard alien culture embodying some distressing principle and smugly extol Federation virtues by contrast. Do this only if you can make the alien culture evoke a sense of pity, danger or even self-identification in the players. It's always tricky to oppose two worthwhile virtues, of course, but the outcome can be very rewarding indeed if it's done correctly.

To structure the morality play, it often helps to build a deeply realized and plausible NPC to be the advocate for each side (or for the non-Federation side, at least). Letting the Crew cast the deciding vote between two well-defended, rational and moral alternatives will lead to some lengthy dialogue scenes but the resulting character development will be worth any minor slowdown of the plot. Throw in an action scene somewhere if necessary, but many morality play episodes can be roleplayed without a single die roll. Keep the descriptions neutral; the dialogue should be the only subjective elements in such stories. Of course, if you prefer a little old-fashioned social engineering at the expense of some distasteful alien society, feel free to use the setting and descriptions to really emphasize the racist, sexist, sadistic, exploitative, merciless, genocidal, closed-minded, totalitarian or similarly morally impoverished nature of the benighted alien planet. Play it up for all it's worth with chains on the walls and evil on planetary video broadcasts. Then when the Crew is in the midst of planning their rescue or coup, remind them of the Prime Directive and make a proper morality play of it after all.

Allegory

Morality plays are one subset of the allegory. Allegorical episodes are episodes where the plot elements, antagonists, NPCs or settings



represent something else. Often, allegories make a political statement or present historical injustices in science-fictional dress. For example, the Bajor-Cardassia story line allegorizes 20th-century Middle East tensions much as the plight of Dorvan V recalls the tragedies of the 19th-century Indian Wars and their aftermath. Elements of other types of stories may also carry allegorical weight; the Ktarian game obviously represents not only 20th-century video game and television addiction, but the power of passive addiction in general. Allegorical stories can be stories of talky introspection or sword-swinging action; the most important thing about allegory is making the parallel clear without seeming preachy or blindingly obvious.

Like morality plays, allegorical episodes present some pitfalls for Narrators. It's important to keep the overlying plot interesting: if the story collapses without the symbolism, you should rewrite the story. Similarly, make the NPCs real people, not caricatures of some trend, ethos or political belief. Don't just make, for example, a Vulcan represent logic and rationality, or a Ferengi represent greed and lust. Give the Vulcan a personality, give the Ferengi his honor and his skill. Some players might object to the episode's take on current political issues; Narrators should tread lightly before assuming that the players are all unanimous in its opinion of, say, the Irish troubles, before setting up an allegory depending on such unanimity. If the Narrator is trying to provoke conflict within the Crew, a political allegory is an excellent way to go about it. That's a tough thing to reconcile with the goal of collaborative fun if it spills over into the player group.

Personal Crisis

The most extreme form of introspective story is the tale of personal crisis. This is the moment when everything literally hangs on one character's will and desire to live. These stories are matters of life and death on a deeply personal level, and center the attention on a single character like Picard's torture at the hands of Gul Madred or Riker's hallucinatory madness on Tilonus IV. Hence, these episodes should not be too common, if only because repeated personal crises wind up trivializing all of them. Personal crisis usually involves introspection, but it can be combined with other stories and types of stories depending on the character involved. Allegory and morality play stories often have a role in these episodes as well.

Since these story lines focus intently on one character, the other players will find themselves with little to do during the majority of scenes. Make sure that your players don't object to spectating once in a while. If they prefer playing to watching (and many players do), try running these stories using troupe style play (see p. 29) with the players taking the temporary roles of major NPCs. Alternatively, put the personal crisis in another episode as the main subplot, as Picard's torture was a subplot to Jellico's

command of the *Enterprise* and the near-war with the Cardassians in "Chain of Command." As with any introspective story, make sure that the other NPCs are richly drawn, realistically motivated and make sense in the story line. The same caution goes for the plot. Cardboard characters or a contrived plot will only cheapen the personal crisis, and detract from the player's enjoyment of and identification with his character. Of course, some players may not want their characters to undergo a personal crisis. Talk it over with the affected player before planning to drive mad, crush the spine of, or similarly traumatize his character.

Romance

A usually more pleasant, but still important, type of introspective story is the romance. Although romantic elements often occur in episodes involving Riker, a romantic plot is only central in episodes such as "Lessons" or "Sub Rosa." Unless you plan on making the repetition of love and loss a major part of a character's development, keep the major romances to a minimum for any given character. Like personal crises, romances fade into dramatic triviality if they occur too often. Romance makes an excellent stimulus to a good morality play, and a Klingon or Vulcan romance could involve a large amount of action. The episode structure should be classically plain but the actual narration should be as florid and, well, romantic, as the sensibilities of you and your game group can stand.

Romance between Crew characters is a potential recurring subplot element, but as Narrator you have to leave that up to the players to develop. In fact, it's very difficult to force a Crew character into a romance, although an NPC could always develop a crush on him (which can be played straight, as tragedy or as comedy). The Crew character could fall under the influence of some powerful aphrodisiac or mood-altering chemical such as Troyian tears or the Psi 2000 virus. Keep that sort of plot development to a minimum until you know your player well; many players object to having their decision-making powers constrained in that way. Any romantic NPC should be as real as possible, and ideally should be designed to be attractive to the character (and to the player, if possible and desirable, for extra identification).

Comedy

Playing the episode for laughs sometimes occurs by accident, of course, but this category concentrates on intentionally humorous stories and scenes. Many of the subtle character-developing moments in *Star Trek* rest on humor, of course. Some characters, like Lwaxana Troi or Professor Berlinghoff Rasmussen, exist almost solely as comic relief. Pure comedy episodes are rather fewer and farther between, despite the success of farce in "A Fistful of Datas." The key to comedy is timing. Keep the scenes rapid-fire and keep the dialogue crisp. If a joke doesn't work, don't keep the scene going in the hopes of resurrecting it, just end it and move on to the next one.

Comedy often works best by keeping the story, the Crew and the other NPCs resolutely straight and just encouraging the players to see the funny side of it. If nobody but the players and Narrator gets the joke, watching the Crew deal with some ludicrous situation is even funnier. There are, as mentioned above, successful comic-relief NPCs in the series, but players don't always enjoy playing straight man to the Narrator. Similarly, as the Marx Brothers proved, a planet full of straight men is the greatest gift a comedic Crew could ever wish for. Running a lot of comedy episodes is too difficult for the limited payoff. It can also wind up making it harder for the players to take the dramatic episodes seriously. However, as an occasional one-shot, or as a tension-reducing subplot, comedy can be very enjoyable for all concerned.

Escapism

Episodes of pure escapism are just told for the heck of it. Often holodeck stories are escapist, with no other objective but to dress up the standard Crew as 1930s detectives, Sherlock Holmes characters or similarly entertaining options. Q can serve the same function, setting characters in Robin Hood's England, for example. Occasionally these stories carry an introspective cargo, but they mostly function as simple puzzle-style mysteries or hack-and-shoot actioners. And there's nothing at all wrong with that. Sometimes, players and Narrators alike need a little vacation from saving the universe and just want to machine gun bad guys for four hours. Narrate it any way you want; play off the players' desires and just keep the story moving.

Of course, the best *Star Trek: The Next Generation* stories blend many different types together. Even our example story of Admiral K'tavv and the *U.S.S. Argonne* involves action, deadline, mystery, introspection and a hint of morality play. Other episodes may combine elements in different proportions. A romance with an action subplot is very different from an action story with a romantic subplot, for example. Don't feel restricted to just a few types of stories, and don't keep them all "one-note" episodes.

The Starfleet Game

It's safe to say that the majority of *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* series will involve the player characters in Starfleet in some way. Most likely, they will be Starfleet officers or crew, or personnel closely attached to Starfleet operations. For such characters, questions will arise that spring from the nature of the milieu itself. Narrators should make sure that they are ready to take these questions and their answers to heart and turn them from areas of doubt and uncertainty to issues that support the game and keep the series seeming true to the spirit of *Star Trek*. Fortunately, since these issues arise from the nature of the Starfleet milieu, they work with the grain of a series once the Narrator understands the principles involved and can work them into her narration and her dealings with the players.

Chain of Command

One interesting aspect of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* is the very real possibility that the characters will be of differing ranks. If one player's character outranks another, or all the others, there exists a possibility of power going to that player's head. This can create a problem for some groups; many players don't even appreciate the Narrator forcing their characters to do things, so they certainly won't enjoy having a fellow player telling them what to do.

First of all, work with the players during character creation to make sure that they are all reasonably content with the rank structure as it emerges in their party. If a player with a tendency toward autocracy and rudeness winds up playing a Lt. Commander, it might be worth everybody's time to decide that some other player should buy a little extra rank and play a Commander. Some player groups tend to have a leader already, who has emerged by default in previous games. Although it can be both courteous and interesting to give other players a chance, there's no absolute reason to mess with a system that is already working. Many players prefer the roleplaying challenge of taking on a character whose rank makes them more acted upon than acting (although even a Wesley Crusher or an Ensign Ro manages to get their share of the spotlight). Using troupe style play and rotating command among the players in any given episode presents yet another possibility. The advantages of this approach, and some advice on the specifics, are dealt with below (see p. 29).

It's important to remember that the command structure of Starfleet is considerably looser than many 20th-century militaries. Commanding officers in Starfleet give their subordinates wide latitude to solve problems, always listen to other input and work from a well-understood code of common conduct that emphasizes individual responsibility for shared goals. Try to keep your players within that structure. Martinets and disciplinarians are almost always guest stars in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and they should remain NPCs in games. Only very rarely does the Captain have to punctuate some order with "And that's a direct order, Lieutenant." Subordinates, it's important to remember, keep quiet and follow orders at that point, but those points are few and far between.

One way to enforce Starfleet culture is to ride the commanding officer as hard as he rides his crew. Starfleet Admirals should outrank any player character, and if they get bad morale reports from a starship, they'll want to know the reason why. Don't be petty or retributive. You certainly don't want to get into a shoving match with one player with the other players in the middle. But don't let a player get away with behavior not suitable to a Starfleet officer, either. Be stingy with commendations and promotions for hardliners and tinpot despots.

On the other hand, if the player of the ranking character is a sensible sort of person and not too terribly indecisive, having a "party leader" can do wonders for speeding up the game. After everyone has had their say, the Narrator can just ask what the commanding officer's decision is and get on with the scene. Delays, seemingly endless debates and aimless time wasting drop dramatically when one player has to take responsible action. As long as the other players feel that their characters have some input, and as long as the decisions work out relatively well for everybody, most gaming groups will accept and actively appreciate the coherence and smoothness that the Starfleet decision making process brings to the game.

There may even be characters outside the normal Starfleet rank structure; allied personnel (Klingons, for example) accompanying the starship on its mission, or even civilians. Don't encourage the players of these characters to upset the Starfleet apple cart. As easygoing as Starfleet procedure is, it still operates under the principle of command unity. But playing a semi-detached civilian can be an outlet for some players as an alternative to the formality of rank and position. Ben the Ten Forward waiter certainly never let fleet protocol stop him from having fun, after all.

Academy Training

Another wrinkle in characters portraying Starfleet officers is the question of skill. Starfleet officers are all well-skilled at their jobs, have a broad base of knowledge in other Starfleet operations, and often master other recondite sciences and arts. Picard, for example, is a tactical genius, an expert archaeologist, a diplomat and a capable leader. Although he is one of Starfleet's best, Starfleet is composed of humanity's best. The *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* system reflects this.

It might seem that with every character possessed of a broad range of skills, some of which overlap each other, characters would tend to sameness and the game become dull. Having skilled characters could ostensibly make developing episodes more difficult for the Narrator, as it becomes harder to present truly challenging obstacles. This impression may have some surface validity, but it just is not the case for *Star Trek*, either the series or the roleplaying game.

Overlapping skills are not a problem. In fact, although significantly different levels and areas of party skill can be useful, they are hardly necessary for a successful roleplaying game. Even if a party is composed entirely of human security officers, Vulcan science officers, or Ferengi xenobotanists the individual characters will have differing approaches to the problems, and it should be those individual character differences (which might mirror different player approaches) that drive the story. Scotty, La Forge and O'Brien wouldn't have the same response to an engineering problem — much less to a question of command, tactics, negotiations or any of the hundreds of other challenges that Starfleet officers must be prepared to face. Your more diverse party of player characters will bring comparatively more varied perspectives to any obstacle or story element.

Finally, of course, having a party full of characters who are good at a lot of things means that you, as Narrator, have more roads to a successful climax to any episode. This, then, means that you needn't present trivial challenges to be sure of character success. The stories become more dramatic, more exciting, more meaningful. If the engineer can't fix the shield projectors, maybe the science officer can have a crack at them. That's another chance for the players to save the day. The executive officer, weapons officer and captain can all contribute something to the knotty problem of outfighting a hostile ship. Medical officers, xenologists and science officers all come in handy identifying bizarre alien plants. This is not a bad thing, unless one player always gets the glory. But, with the skills as broad and the characters as competent as they are, it's difficult for that to happen.

Communicators and Splitting the Party

A common problem in many other roleplaying games is the problem of "splitting the party." If one group goes off ahead to scout, takes an entirely different path or stays back at base, the Narrator is stuck with only half a game. While the Narrator continues to set up scenes for one group, the other players lose attention, the game loses focus, and continuity and mood are broken. Thus, splitting the party can present a problem for keeping the plot moving and the game on track.

Two solutions to this problem work in any roleplaying game. Jump cutting (p. 35) between the separate parties is tricky, but it can actually work to build tension. Troupe style play (p. 29) can also help by providing useful NPC roles for the "offstage" party to take temporarily. These techniques can be difficult to master, though; be careful before betting the game on them.



Fortunately, *Star Trek* actually works in the Narrator's favor when it comes to splitting the party. Thanks to the omnipresent badge communicator (or to scanning tricorders), it's very easy to rule that a separate party is still in contact with the other group. They have a way to contribute to and help out with remote scenes. Cutting off communications should wait until you feel comfortable with jump cuts or troupe style Narration; it's tense enough if the Away Team can't transport out but can still tell the ship about the deadly radiation seeping out of the rocks....

Know Your Universe

Star Trek has a big, complex, sprawling universe. Keeping up with the TV shows and movies can be challenging, especially if reference material and novelizations are added to the mix. The Narrator doesn't have to have the whole thing memorized and at instant recall, but sometimes it seems like it would help. The Narrator at least has notes and published scenarios to help her out. In addition, the Narrator gets to choose the ground for the game. If you know the Klingons cold, you can set a lot of your episodes in and around the Klingon Empire and the Klingon Neutral Zone, and involve a lot of Klingon politics, culture, etc. in the story lines. Players have no such cushion. This can be difficult if, say, they are playing Klingons.

This problem is exacerbated by the fact that Starfleet characters know a lot of things about astronomy, nuclear physics, biology and tactics that players might not know. In addition, they know things like warp engine design, 22nd-century history and alien etiquette that the players simply have no way of knowing — unless it came up in a TV episode they happened to watch. If the Narrator's plot turns on the xenologist recognizing a Klingon glob fly, and the player doesn't know a horsefly from a butterfly, trouble could ensue.

The first and most important arrow in the Narrator's quiver for adjusting the gap between player and character knowledge is the Skill Test. Simply calling for a Test lets the Narrator say "Those buzzing things are Klingon glob flies." Even better, just assume that the xenologist knows a Klingon glob fly when he sees one and work it into the basic scene description: "As you walk over the alien meadow, you hear the familiar whine of a Klingon glob fly."

The second major advantage you have is the incredibly user-friendly *Enterprise* (or other starship) computer. If ever there was a machine designed to provide useful backstory to the players with exactly the right level of detail, the starship computer is it. Tricorders can serve a similarly useful function. Once you've provided data to the players, it never hurts to work it into a future episode, too. Not only does that save you some creation time, it makes the universe seem more coherent and gives the player a more realistic sense of being an expert in that particular field, or at least that piece of it.

Of course, *Star Trek* fans being who they are, the chances are pretty good that one of your players is completely up to speed on every last detail of the universe already, without any help from you. That can be a problem if there happens to be some obscure fact out there that contradicts what you just said. Sometimes, the only thing to do is to calmly explain that they must have misremembered their Academy training; that's not the way things actually are in the universe, although it's a common misconception. The Narrator needs to maintain control of her game. Of course, if it's a minor point, simply adjust the Narration and move on. Sometimes a contradiction is exactly what you want.

Narrator: "As you walk over the alien meadow, you hear the familiar whine of a Klingon glob fly."

Xenologist's Player: "They're not poisonous, are they?"

Star Trek Expert Player: "No, but they shouldn't be here; they're native to Qo'noS, the Klingon homeworld and don't breed in yellow sunlight."

Narrator: [to Xenologist Player] "It certainly does seem odd to you, especially since the nearest Klingon planet is 45 parsecs away."

Xenologist Player: [Getting into the spirit of it] "45.7 parsecs away, actually. Although there are two subspecies that breed in orange sunlight; it could be a mutation...."

The Narrator can always use the xenologist player's improvisation, or a subsequent tricorder reading could give the original answer: that these flies have only recently arrived on the world (because they were accidentally brought here by a Klingon spy craft, which the Narrator doesn't plan to tell the players about until they follow up the glob fly clue and scan for cloaked ships).

The ideal answer is to turn that *Star Trek* expert player into a resource, not a problem. Turn to them first for "computer output," improvising the important parts after they run out of steam. Encourage them to play science officer characters and similarly knowledgeable sorts. Let those players, and all the others, help build your universe, and

they will have a stake in believing in it when you spring the cloaked Klingon spy craft on them. It's a better game and a better universe, in short, if everyone feels like they're part of building it. That is, after all, what roleplaying is all about.

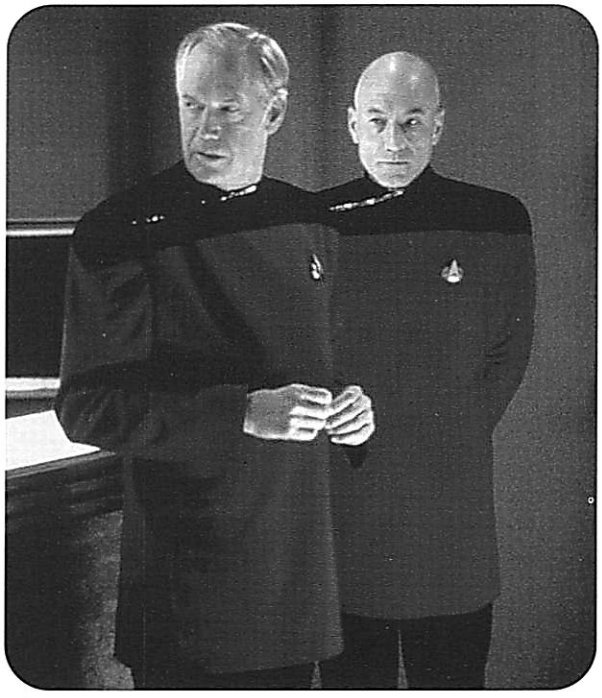
Advanced Play Options

None of these techniques need to be included in your *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* series. They are optional campaign styles for you to adopt or not depending on your comfort level with the concepts involved. Some of them might seem a little daunting to brand-new roleplayers and Narrators, but they can give a level of richness and dimension to a series that will prove challenging and rewarding to everyone in the game. Don't feel constrained to try them just because they're "in the rulebook," but don't abandon the possibilities they represent out of hand, either.

Troupe Style Play

In troupe style play, the one-character-to-one-player rule is broken, as players make up multiple characters and play whichever ones best fit the episode. Rather than make up only one character and staying with that single character for every episode, in troupe style gaming players can make up as many characters as they wish and rotate among them as the story or their interest dictates. In a *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* troupe, players might each make up a bridge crewman, a security crewman and a technical specialist (such as a doctor, an engineer or a planetary specialist of some sort). That way, the Away Team can actually be structured to fit the details of the mission, rather than bringing the Chief Engineer, the Chief Medical Officer and the Operations Manager down onto every new planet. Each player can be sure that their character will play a more important role in the story rather than being tacked on at the last minute. Here's an example of how one such troupe might work:

Player	Bridge Crew	Technical Specialist	Security Team
Jim:	*Captain*	Planetologist	Security Ensign
Ingrid:	*XO/Weapons*	Chief Medical Officer	Security Lieutenant
Dan:	*Science Officer*	Chief Engineer	Asst. Weapons Officer
Mike:	*Helmsman*	Xenologist	Chief Security



Thus, for diplomatic missions, Jim and Ingrid play their Bridge Crew members, Mike takes on the role of the Xenologist (handy for dealing with aliens), and Dan brings his Weapons Officer along for security. For scientific missions, Dan commands the Away Team as Science Officer, Ingrid can play the Medical Officer, and Mike and Jim can play either their science personnel or their security personnel depending on the seriousness of the situation. For espionage missions into the Neutral Zone or against Cardassian allied planets, Ingrid might command the Away Team as Executive Officer, with Mike backing her up as Chief of Security and Dan and Jim choosing technical or security personnel, again depending on the complexity or danger expected.

Some episodes might see one or two changes of character: an exploration episode might begin on the bridge with everyone playing Bridge Crew, cut to an Away Team of technical and scientific personnel to investigate some space artifact, and continue as Weapons and Security characters battle an infestation of giant alien spiders. Introspective stories, romances and escapist stories, of course, can involve any combination of characters — troupe style play also spreads out the potential subjects of major romances and personal crises. Players might be more willing to take dramatic or character risks with a character in troupe style play, knowing

that they have two fully-developed characters waiting in the wings.

Troupe style play can also give players a chance to stretch their roleplaying muscles. Rather than play a coldly logical Vulcan scientist every episode, a player in a troupe style game can take a break from logic and play a boisterous Tellarite doctor or an enthusiastic Human navigator. Note that this kind of arrangement can also let everyone play different ranks in different episodes, which will work to strengthen everyone's common goals and prevent players misusing their character's rank in the game.

In most cases, the players will determine which characters they'd like to play for a given episode, and when (or if) to trade off. In other cases, the Narrator can write an episode that clearly calls for a specific set of characters. If the Narrator knows in advance that her shore leave story line will give the Weapons Officer little to do, she can ask that character's player to play his Flight Control Officer for the sake of the story.

Players can also take on the roles of NPCs in some troupe style games. This works especially well with recurring NPCs like Starfleet admirals, Klingon emissaries or similar folk who won't necessarily serve as the Crew's antagonists in a given episode. It's possible for some players to play their antagonists, but it's much harder for the Narrator to surprise the Crew in that case. NPCs who appear only in one episode can also make interesting characters for players to take on: roleplaying someone who is unfamiliar with the rest of the Crew can bring out some valuable challenges and perspectives. Letting the other players take NPC roles can be helpful for episodes like "The Inner Light" or "First Contact" where only one regular Crew character appears for the majority of the plot. This requires that the players not "throw the game" in favor of the Federation, but you might be surprised how willingly and well players will take to portraying neutral, or even opposing, characters.

The only problem with troupe style play (besides the fact that it can be unfamiliar to some roleplayers) is the loss of continuous character growth and in-character development. A character that isn't roleplayed regularly has a harder time becoming more real. It might be a good idea to save one scene, such as the final conclusion, for the players to play their "main characters" (usually, but not always, the bridge crew) and discuss the events of the episode in character. Something like the regular poker game on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* would work very well as such a scene. This will not only help to keep continuity in a character, but continuity in the series.

The other aspect of troupe style play is multiple narration. This is trickier to handle than multiple-character troupe style play, since the Narrator is the last word on what is going on in the universe. Somebody has to keep the game moving, the story straight and all the other details in line. Some groups, of course, use multiple Narrator's to give their prime Narrator a respite from mechanics and to let them concentrate on scene-setting and storytelling. In those groups, often one player will help run the combats, keeping the rules in the background while the prime Narrator describes the action play-by-play style. Assistant Narrators might also help the prime Narrator with details of the *Star Trek* universe (see *Know Your Universe*, p. 28), prop design (see p. 46) or other things.

From there, it's a short step to giving assistant Narrators their own episodes to run. Perhaps one player has designed an interesting alien planet and wants to narrate an episode centering on it. Other groups may have one Narrator to handle ship stories, or planet stories or holodeck stories. Troupe style narration can also lead to loss of continuity. Unless you are very, very sure of your direction, it makes sense to choose one Narrator as prime Narrator, who can arbitrate any inconsistencies and settle any disagreements over the nature of the game universe. In groups such as these, with rotating Narrators, it is usually a good idea to leave the prime Narrator with control over major plot arcs and the direction of the series as a whole. Other Narrators should be careful not to contradict series continuity: if the main story arc deals with Romulan plots, any other episodes narrated by secondary Narrators should take place well away from Romulan space just to be on the safe side. Some groups might set one Narrator's episodes on an entirely different ship — the players might have two sets of Crew characters that never overlap, or only meet during rare "crossover" events. Make sure a secondary Narrator is up to the challenge before giving him leverage over main parts of the series. Holodeck stories, of course, make perfect opportunities to try out a new Narrator for the group.

Series Guest Stars

Part of the excitement of playing in the *Star Trek* universe is the knowledge that this is the same universe that the *Enterprise-D* cruises under the command of Captain Picard, the universe where Admiral Kirk set legendary standards for Starfleet personnel that are still followed, the universe where the bar of pressed latinum in your quarters might have been handled by Quark himself. Narrators

will find it a natural temptation to refer to events of the *Star Trek* series, especially at the beginning of a series while building "realism" and continuity. There's nothing at all wrong with that, of course, although your players might give you grief if you contradict some element of series continuity in such references.

Narrators might also want to bring a character from the series into an episode as an NPC. This has a lot of advantages. To start with, it immediately gets your players' attention. They'll perk up much more for Captain Picard than for Captain Smith. It also serves as a useful shorthand for the NPC's personality: every player knows how Commander Riker will behave at the diplomatic ball, what he looks like and many other details that for a new NPC would require a lot of careful and detailed description. Players may also get a bigger thrill out of an adventure involving one of these famous and heroic officers — it's a real-world effect of high Renown, basically.

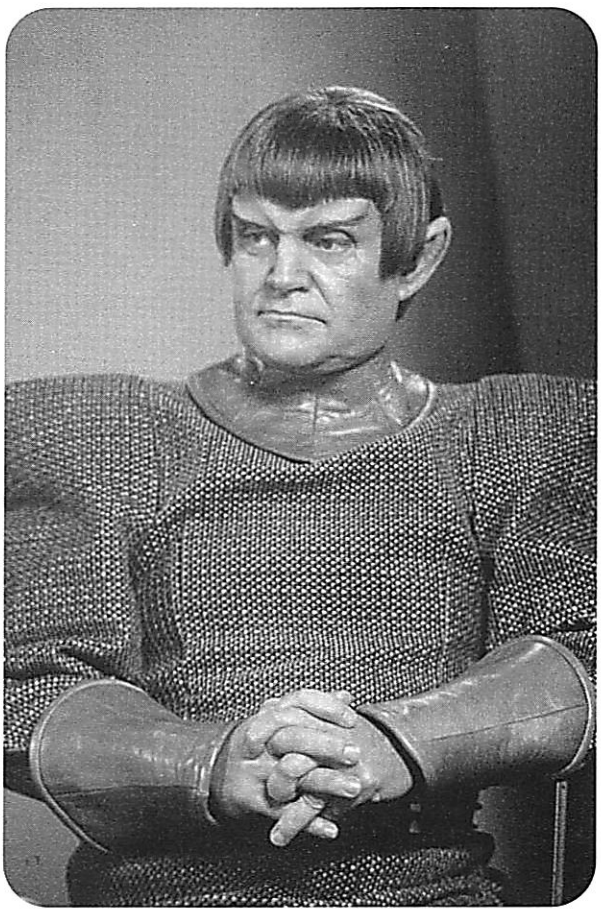
However, there are some pitfalls for Narrators planning to introduce a series guest star. First of all, the players' high degree of knowledge and identification with a character can actually get in the way of the episode. Players might feel a degree of ownership of series NPCs that they wouldn't feel for other NPCs. If your narration contrasts too strongly with their mental image of the character, it will break realism and identification for the players. It might even go beyond mental reservation into vocal objection; *Star Trek* fans are seldom shy about expressing their opinions about the series characters. The last thing you want is for that diplomatic ball scene to come to a screeching halt as the players argue whether "Riker would really do that."

The other hazard you can run into when introducing series guest stars is your own love for the character. It is absolutely vital to everyone's enjoyment of the game that the Narrator keep from focusing the episode on an NPC. With NPCs drawn from the series, it can be a real and continuing temptation to let them take over your game. Do not let this become a story about your guest star! Keep the player characters central, even if they're dealing with Ambassador Spock himself. They'll still be mighty impressed that they got a scene with Spock, and you won't run as much risk of your series guest star turning boring or normal, or of the players objecting to some detail of his portrayal.

Playing the Series

From seeing the series characters as NPCs, it's a short logical step to playing them as Crew characters in an ongoing series. Although it's more likely that players will want to create their own characters and tell their own stories in the *Star Trek* universe, it is certainly possible to play the characters from the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* series in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game*. Some players might even find that they have a higher "comfort level" starting out playing Picard, Data, Worf and company in their adventures. After all, these characters are already well known to everyone; it's a lot easier to start out roleplaying by imitating someone else. Also, stories starring the series characters can seem more important or more "real" than stories involving a lesser-known crew on a not-yet-legendary ship.

By using the series characters, the Narrator has immediate access to probably thousands of episode ideas. Along those lines, the Narrator will probably have more immediate ideas about plot lines involving Picard, Troi, Riker or Data than for the officers the players just created last weekend. Anything that helps the Narrator over the creative hump of developing compelling stories is certainly a good thing.



But these obvious advantages come with some dangers that you, as Narrator, should be aware of. Essentially, many of the difficulties in series guest stars occur with series characters as Crew, only squared and cubed. Contradiction of previous show continuity can be a real problem for players who haven't got all 178 episodes memorized, for example. The problem of assumption clash is present in a much more serious form as well. Not only does the player portraying Picard or Data risk kibitzing, second-guessing and corrections from the other players about what their character would or wouldn't do, they also might object strenuously to the numbers used to represent these legendary Starfleet officers' skills on the character sheet.

The temptation to cast every episode in the game in terms of episodes of the television show will also work against building player identification with the game. Even with the best will in the world, a Narrator will find it a challenge to create a roleplaying game episode as powerful as "Yesterday's Enterprise" or "Chain of Command," especially if the Narrator is a beginner.



Similarly, it is doubtful that most players have decades of Shakespearean or Broadway experience to bring to their parts. Until the players have begun to discover the unique power and potential of roleplaying games, powers and potential that television simply cannot match, the trap of making inaccurate comparisons will remain.

Finally, playing someone else's character makes for less challenging roleplaying. To start with, the series characters are very, very capable: even more so than the usual Starfleet officer. The challenges of playing a superman are certainly present, but it's usually harder and more rewarding to earn your success and skills. Like anything else, the reward of character success is commensurate with the effort. Not only is playing Picard less rewarding than working your own Starfleet lieutenant up to the captaincy over years of play, it's less rewarding as a roleplaying exercise. The player copies someone else rather than developing her own skills. It's more like impersonation than acting. Roleplaying involves putting your own thoughts and feelings on the line through another person's situation; that's harder, but much more valuable than repeating someone else's already-realized role.

However, if the Narrator keeps these caveats in mind, there's no reason that players can't have fun running a quick one-shot episode starring the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* heroes as a break from a more conventional series. If everyone is comfortable with the notion, go ahead and narrate an entire series-based campaign. After all, as long as everyone is having fun, you're doing it right.

"Lower Decks"

In the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode "Lower Decks," the plot centered on four very junior members of the *Enterprise* crew. Not in on the briefing sessions in the observation lounge or privy to the command secrets of Riker or Picard, their story gave an interesting perspective of how "the other half" sees Starfleet. A "Lower Decks" series would focus on player characters who don't visit the bridge, aren't part of senior officer planning and don't run departments.

This series can be a real opportunity for roleplaying. It's likely that a lot more of the episodes will be ship stories, and the player characters won't be likely to save the ship from unknown danger very often. These episodes will center on character development; introspection and similarly personal stories will predominate. Action episodes can sneak in if the Crew makes up part of a planetary garrison on the Cardassian border; space battles will be less suitable as

the focus for "Lower Decks" stories since the player characters won't be commanding the ship's combat tactics. Players with a taste for intrigue and political roleplaying might even enjoy roleplaying the bureaucracy of getting minor things done in the lower echelons of Starfleet, sitting for promotional boards and attending diplomatic functions as busboys and waitresses. More active characters will be getting into scrapes and adventures in the engineering section, prowling the corridors in search of some clue about what's going on and jockeying for a rare planetside assignment. Deadlines in a "Lower Decks" episode will be more likely to center on personal embarrassment or minor dangers ("If we don't get this tribble hidden by inspection, we'll be demoted!" "We have to rescue Ensign Emmett from the stuck Jeffries tube before Lieutenant Commander La Forge runs the diagnostic check!") than the imminent destruction of the space-time continuum. Players with a taste for small-scale victories and the unique savor of getting away with something may find "Lower Decks" style campaigns the most enjoyable roleplaying they've ever done.

The downside of the "Lower Decks" series is that the characters really are out of the loop. They will be ordered around a lot, kept in the dark and not allowed or encouraged to act independently on the kind of regular basis that senior staff are. This has the potential to create a feeling of powerlessness that can lessen player enjoyment. After all, plenty of players come to roleplaying to get away for a few hours from a world where they are kept in the dark and ordered around without much responsibility. Occasional holodeck episodes can go part of the way to countering those feelings, but can't really replace a command-level series. The natural constraints of a "Lower Decks" series can also work to weaken the axiom of personal competence and responsibility that much of the *Star Trek* story line depends upon. After all, the characters don't have as much skill and experience as starship bridge crew have, by definition. Similarly, by definition, their responsibilities are starkly constrained.

Of course, one way around that particular pitfall is to narrate the series as the story of these junior crewmen's steady rise to skill and responsibility. Focus more of the game on promotions, advancement, giving slowly-increasing amounts of accountability and obligation to the Crew as the series progresses. Eventually, they might transfer to another ship, then get command of a smaller *Defiant*-type escort or *Oberth*-class science vessel, transfer back to an *Intrepid*-class ship for seasoning and experience, and eventually get responsible posts on a *Galaxy*-class starship of the line. Characters that the players



have followed literally from enlistment to command will be characters that the players definitely identify with; it would be hard to imagine a deeper and more rewarding roleplaying experience in the *Star Trek* universe.

Even if you don't decide to narrate the whole series from the below-Deck-5 perspective, an episode or two where the players take the role of ensigns and enlisted crewmen can provide a break from business as usual. This kind of variation helps deepen an existing series; just as a distant object gains dimension and form when viewed from more than one vantage point, the series universe becomes more and more real and all-encompassing with more than one player perspective. Occasional "Lower Decks" style episodes can be set up using troupe style play (see p. 29); it is up to the Narrator and the players whether to cross the low-ranking characters over with the seasoned bridge crew types. On the one hand, it can work to knit the two types of story together into a unified whole. On the other, much of the charm of "Lower Decks" style games is endangered if the low-ranking characters actually get too much attention from on high. Go with whatever feels best for your game and your players, in the final analysis.



Advanced Storytelling

This chapter deals with some "tricks of the trade" that Narrators may want to try introducing into *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* episodes one piece at a time. The narrative techniques can be experimental; try them out one at a time before using them all at once. As with many optional or unfamiliar techniques or story elements, holodeck episodes make excellent opportunities to try these tricks before risking the continuity and realism of your ongoing campaign.

Other topics covered in this chapter also have a "modular" nature. Not every group will need all the advice here. One hopes your game group won't have any problem players, but if you do there are ways to turn them into successful parts of your game. Not all groups enjoy playing roleplaying games using lights, music or props but an increasing number do. Read the advice on these topics, and it might even inspire you to add them to your game sessions as an experiment or for special occasions.

Narrative Techniques

These narrative techniques, many taken from film and TV, can be applied to roleplaying games on an experimental basis. If a given option doesn't make sense to you now, hold off on it. It's always best to get some experience telling stories "straight" before monkeying around with newfangled ideas. Plenty of roleplaying campaigns have gone for years without any of these notions and have still provided game fun for everyone. However, if you're trying to capture the "feel" of a television show or a movie like *Star Trek*, some of these options can add to everyone's enjoyment and that sense of difference that a roleplaying game needs to build a unique presence in the minds of Narrators and players alike. Go ahead and experiment; try one or two techniques that sound particularly interesting. If your players enjoy themselves, go back for more.

Jump Cutting

Jump cutting occurs when the camera "jumps" rapidly from scene to scene. In a roleplaying game, rather than playing one scene after another, jump cutting lets you play both scenes at once. For example, in the sample plot line, the outcome of the space battle might depend on the Crew's attack on the Cardassian energy projector. Without jump cutting, the Narrator might have the Crew manage the space battle, waiting for word from the asteroid before the crucial

torpedo barrage. This, unfortunately, takes the power to influence events out of the hands of the players. Or, the Narrator can send the entire Crew to attack the Cardassian asteroid, and then let them watch the space battle on a viewscreen. This, unfortunately, makes the space battle sort of an anticlimax, since the outcome is foretold. Or, the Narrator can split the Crew, sending one half to the asteroid and leaving one half to manage the space battle. Of course, that merely adds the disadvantages of both the previous options together without solving either — the Crew in space has no real influence on events, and the Crew on the asteroid has to twiddle its thumbs waiting for the space battle to finish up.

With jump cutting, on the other hand, the Narrator can run both scenes simultaneously. The outcome of decision points in one scene can depend on the outcome of decision points in the other. That way, both halves of the Crew are making decisions at the same time: the ship-bound Crew has to develop its tactics with the possibility that the asteroid Crew might be defeated or captured; the asteroid-bound Crew has the constant pressure of seeing the space battle go badly to hurry them along. Jump cuts make deadline scenes far more dramatic and suspenseful; by jump cutting from the player characters impacting the crisis to the player characters impacted by it, the Narrator ties both halves of the drama together. Better yet, jump cuts from one scene of furious activity to another involving characters who don't yet know of their danger can really build suspense above and beyond a simple deadline.

You might consider making the jump from scene to scene at climax points or cliffhangers. It might seem cruel to keep players in suspense about the outcome of their fight scene, but it keeps everyone focused on the game. The players pay much more attention to scenes their characters aren't in if they have to wait until the asteroid is captured by the other characters to find out how their fight with the Cardassians will come out. Better still, jump after every exchange of phaser fire; the rapid-fire switches of scene will prevent any player group from getting bored and will encourage rapid decisive thinking and fast-paced game action.

The downside of jump cutting is that it can be confusing to players and difficult to keep track of for some Narrators. It can also lead to a lot of interruptions and distraction, as players in one scene try to get the Narrator to point the story camera back in their direction rather than advance the plot in another scene. These disadvantages will go away with practice, and the tremendous possibilities of jump cutting for developing and maintaining suspense make it well worth the risk once you are confident enough of your narration skills to try jump cuts.

Troupe style gaming also works well with jump cuts. In those circumstances the jump cut becomes a device of pure drama; since the players will likely all have characters in each scene, it is no longer necessary to use the jump cut to keep player interest in a scene not involving them.

Parallel Plots

On a larger scale, running parallel plots involves building two story lines into the same episode and running them concurrently. Parallel plots are more closely related than the standard plot-and-subplot structure of a conventional episode. In some cases, parallel plots follow Crew members working against the same enemy. For example, the Breen kidnap a member of the Crew in the introduction. The rest of the episode alternates scenes between the kidnapped character's attempts to free himself and the attempts of the rest of the Crew to free him. Both plots are working toward the same resolution, in this example. Parallel plots can affect each other before the climax, of course. If the kidnapped character manages to send a coded message by sabotaging the Breen warp drive with a mathematical sputter pointing to his coordinates, that will impact the searching characters' story. If, on the other hand, they cut the Breen off from their homeworld or somehow smuggle a weapon to the kidnap victim, they have impacted his plot line.

Another possible parallelism centers on differing Crew reactions to the same NPC, alien species or setting. One plot might involve the NPC's attempted romance of one character as the other plot centers on his attempt to murder another. Less radically, a given culture might be very attractive or sympathetic to the human Crewmembers, but less popular with the Vulcans, or vice versa. When the Vulcan-commanded science team and the human-run command team meet to help decide the culture's fate, the stories meet and climax. The key to this sort of story is that each team has half the information needed to make the correct decision and only by joining their impressions can the players reach a satisfactory resolution.

The parallel plots might encompass more than just the normal Crew. If one plot line is the Crew's attempt to track down a Vulcan superweapon hidden in archaeological clues, the other plot line might center on the

Romulan *Tal Shiar's* attempt to do the same thing. The players could portray the Federation in one plot line and their Romulan opposite numbers in the other. This parallelism of character presents a potentially fascinating opportunity for roleplaying. Ideally, of course, the climax occurs when both the Federation and the Romulan Crews meet at the Vulcan weapon's hiding place — the players might even wind up rolling dice for both sides if things come to blows.

Parallel plots can also interweave in theme rather than in direct effect. If one plot is a story of personal crisis as the captain writhes in a feverish battle with a deadly virus, and the other is a tense story of invasion as the rest of the Crew fights to hold off a Borg invasion of the ship, the thematic continuity will hold the episode together without any overt connection at all. Ideally, of course, both plot lines will reach their climax at the same time in the game.

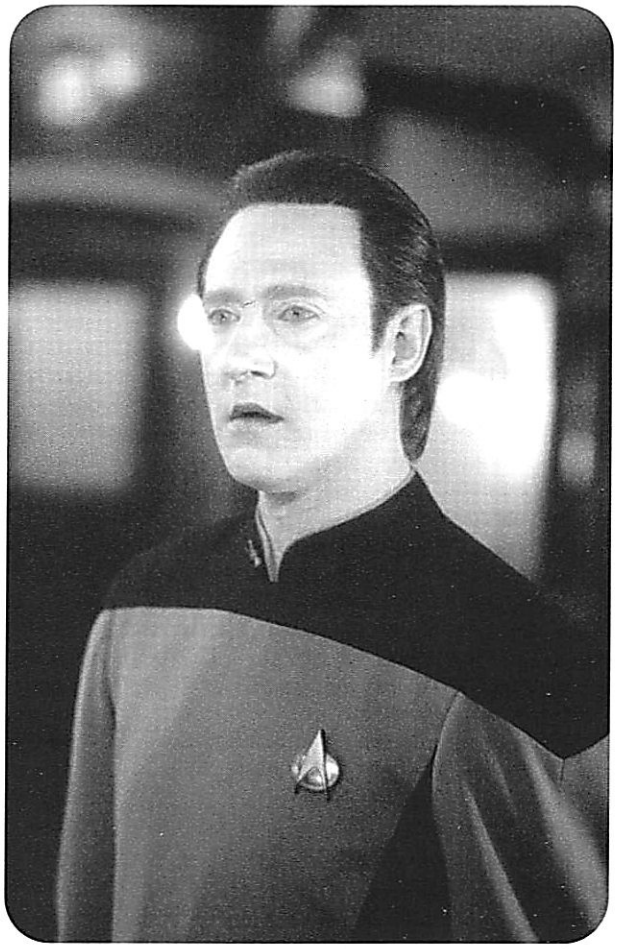
Running two plots at the same time is a tricky balancing act, but the payoff is worth it. In design, parallel plot episodes are similar to episodes with strong subplots. Think of parallel plots as running an episode made up of two important subplots that, together, form a connected narrative. Design each plot line as you would design a simple, straightforward episode with no subplots. Use the index card method (p. 15-17) to construct the plot lines with a common structure. Each plot should have the same number of scenes in introduction and confrontation. The plots then meet at their climaxes, and share a resolution. As a starting point, consider running a scene in one plot line and then a scene in the other one. The actual structure of the parallelism may force you to run a couple of scenes in a row in one plot line, but don't neglect the other one for too long or you risk demoting it to subplot status and spoiling the parallelism. You also risk boring the players of the "offstage" characters.

Again, troupe style play presents an intriguing possibility for parallel plotting, as well as a useful way to prevent players from getting bored with scenes from which their main characters are absent. Similarly, running a "Lower Decks" story line that parallels a larger-scale plot would be an interesting opportunity to use that technique (see p. 32).

Flashbacks

A flashback occurs when a character remembers some vitally important or vivid occurrence that happened to her before the current episode. In some cases, a flashback can be strong enough that the character is seemingly reliving the experience. Flashbacks make an excellent way to present character history information to the other players or to flesh out some previously undeveloped aspect of that officer's past. The flashback provides a useful opportunity for the Narrator to give important clues or information about the plot of the upcoming episode, of course. Flashbacks can also introduce NPCs that the character encountered previously, adding meaning to their subsequent appearance in this week's episode. Finally, of course, flashbacks can give the player a sense of lived experience that rather outclasses even a detailed character history existing only as notes on the character sheet. It might even be a good idea to run a brief flashback sequence for every character in the game before the series begins in order to give some experiential depth to their most important memory.

Flashbacks needn't be solo affairs, of course. Plenty of flashbacks can involve multiple



characters or even the entire Crew, if, for example, they all served on the same ship before the series began. Even without direct character involvement, there can be roles for the other players in a flashback sequence. Pass out the roles of the major NPCs in the flashback sequence to the other players and let them do the hard work of bringing the memories to life through roleplaying. This also helps keep everyone involved, not just the character whose memory is under scrutiny.

This brings up the tricky subject of actually narrating flashback sequences. Since they took place in the past, they can't be altered in any important respect by player action. If the point of the flashback is for the security officer to relive the traumatic defeat of the *U.S.S. Melbourne* at the hands of the Borg at Wolf 359, the player can't save the ship. The player also can't get caught up in the moment and go out in a blaze of glory — the character survived, after all, since it's her memories we're roleplaying. There are a couple of ways to handle this disconnect.

The least satisfying, but certainly the easiest, possibility is to simply narrate the scene briefly but forcefully without any player input. For some flashback sequences this is all that's necessary to set up the current episode situation. Another option, with slightly greater player participation, is to let the player or players deliver dialogue or take minor actions within the flashback sequence, but not roll dice and thereby do anything tremendously important or influential.

A more satisfying possibility yet involves losing a little bit of the surprise element: before running the flashback sequence, sketch out the basic plot of that scene to the players. (Of course, since it's a flashback, there's little real surprise present anyway.) Then let them act that scene out however they wish, as long as they get the essential point across. If the only important thing is that the character and the NPC met at a Romulan embassy ball, let the players engage in flirtatious banter to liven things up — the Narrator can leave the question of who picked up whom to their inventiveness. Players often delight in creating off-the-cuff moments of player history that way: "Ah yes, I remember the diplomatic cotillion on Rigel II well. Yeoman Westin wore blue. The Romulans wore gray." Although this technique works best when the main point of the scene is its emotional content or effect on character depth, the Narrator can always use it to slip in a piece of information: "As you spin Yeoman Westin around the dance floor, you notice that the Romulan military attaché has a peculiar scar on his left hand." When they meet the devilish sector chief of the *Tal Shiar* and that same scar shows up, the impact will be much greater than if the Narrator merely says "You last saw that scar twenty years ago when you met Audra Westin."

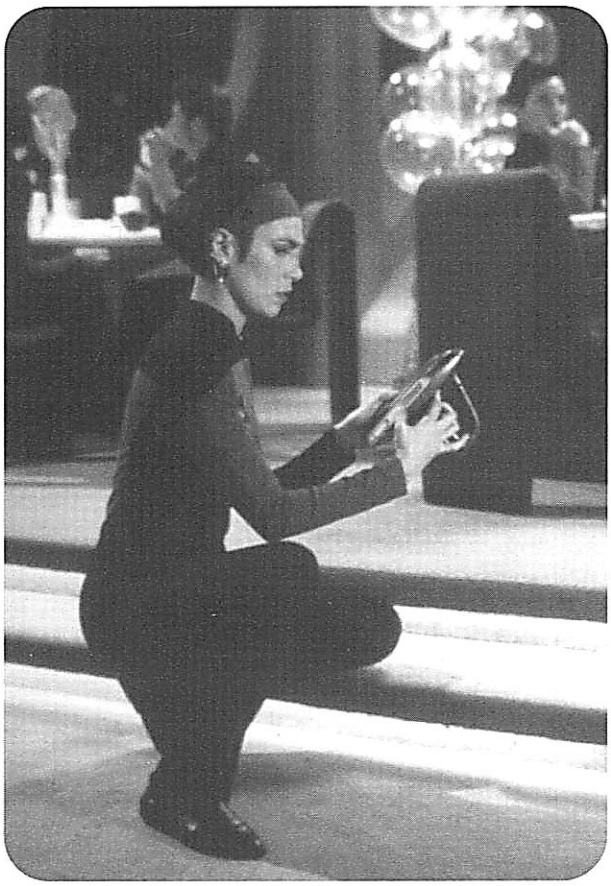
Even more daringly, allow the player to have an impact on the past. Don't let that security officer save the *Melbourne*, but let him save an ensign from a phaser coolant leak. An act of individual heroism like that will keep the story vital to the player and give the Narrator a great improvised hook for the main episode plot: "You hardly recognize that young Ensign now, but as a distinguished-looking Lieutenant Commander, he's delighted to see you and to fill you in on old times. Of course, he also has distressing news from Starfleet... the wreckage of the *Melbourne* has somehow vanished from McKinley Station."

Flashforwards

Flashforwards, obviously, are related to flashbacks although their usual role in a story is to finalize the resolution. In a continuing story like a roleplaying game campaign, it might not be the best idea to set the future in stone. Although time travel has often been used in *Star Trek*, no future is permanent. Still, it can be distracting and even demoralizing to players to find that their future doesn't involve that coveted promotion, for instance. The series may also take an unexpected turn that invalidates some part of the flashforward. The future revealed in "All Good Things..." is unlikely to occur now, for example, since the *Enterprise-D*, seen intact with a third warp nacelle in that episode, was eventually destroyed in *Star Trek: Generations*.

On a smaller scale, it is possible, for example, to start the episode at the climax with a suitably bizarre or dramatic flashforward. The rest of the episode is run as a flashback that explains how such a scene came to be. Scene after scene slowly unfolds the inevitable drama as the characters, seemingly against their will, wind up headed for that dramatic scene.

This technique has been used quite successfully in a number of suspense or mystery movies. It also makes something of a splash in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episodes such as "Cause and Effect" or "Time Squared." And indeed, flashforwards can be a key element in time travel episodes. But imagine the excitement if the opening sequence ends with an Obsidian Order infiltrator firing his disruptor pistol at the Crew — and they spend the next ten scenes building back up to that dramatic



flashforward. Plotting those episodes can be very tough indeed; players can take the story in odd directions and will often resist being herded back to the climax and that gun-toting Cardassian, but if the Narrator sells the buildup well enough, the enjoyment everyone derives from the flashforward story is worth the effort.

Cut Scenes

The cut scene takes place in another place, and sometimes another time, than the main episode plot. The classic cut scene is the quick scene showing the villains planning some awful fate for the heroes: "Little do those human fools know that this spaceship is a deathtrap stocked with lethal holograms." Then the plot returns to the main characters, who are unaware that, as they beam over to the derelict, they are transporting into a trap. The other classic cut scene is the scene at the beginning of the episode establishing the background of some important plot element. This can be the daring rescue of this episode's main NPC, a Romulan defector, by a Starfleet security team or the first attack (on some hapless colonist) of this episode's enigma, a deadly alien psychovore. It could even be a quick scene establishing the history or potential of some key item such as an experimental probe or an heirloom *bat'leth.*

The point of the cut scene in a movie or TV show is to give the audience some piece of information that the protagonists don't know yet. Narrators can use cut scenes to give a story emotional depth, set up a suspenseful situation unbeknownst to the heroes or demonstrate the magnitude of the problem that the characters will eventually have to face. Since part of the players' role in any roleplaying game, and especially a "cinematic" one like the *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG*, is that of audience, cut scenes have a role in game narration.

Cut scenes suffer from the same set of problems as flashbacks: if the Narrator simply describes the action, the players may become bored and disconnected, but if the Narrator lets the players roleplay the cut scene through, it may be hard to keep the scene on track without cramping the players' style. As a general rule, it's best to let the players take a hand at roleplaying the cut scene if they can take on the part of extras or similarly minor NPCs. If the cut scene involves a main antagonist or other important supporting cast member, the risk of damage to the plot is likely too great for the Narrator to risk player input. If the Narrator simply intends to present the scene without player input, it should be presented well and entertainingly. The key to these scenes lies in their inherent drama and excitement; there's no point in adding a boring cut scene.

The other problem with cut scenes is that, although they can increase tension and suspense by showing the players what their characters will eventually face, they can also ruin the surprise of a sudden plot twist or the springing of some cunning villainous trap. Suspense is a more powerful emotion than surprise, to be sure, but some plots (mystery plots, for example) seldom work without the surprise element. Some players also find it difficult to "firewall" the knowledge they have after seeing the cut scene away from the knowledge that their character has at that point in the game. Not every player is capable of having his character beam into a certain ambush, even if the character just thinks that he's beaming onto a derelict spaceship.

Symbolism

Besides its use in allegory and morality play stories, where symbolism is an overt part of

the plot, symbolic events or characters seldom occur openly in *Star Trek* stories. However, the archetypal nature of the main characters, and the slow recasting of *Star Trek* as modern mythology, means that symbolic elements often find their way into the series or movies. These can be side issues, as when the bridge architecture changes from ramps on the real-world *Enterprise-D* (symbolizing equality of access and peace) to steps on the alternate *Enterprise-D* (symbolizing harsh hierarchy and separation) in the episode "Yesterday's Enterprise." The green of the Ferengi emblem represents the Western human identification of green with money and envy rather than any actual concept of Ferengi culture. Other symbolic elements can run throughout an entire series: in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Worf and Data might be seen as representing the seemingly opposing traits of aggression and reason in the human condition and the lesson that each needs to be tempered or complemented by its opposite.



Many of these larger symbolic elements will just start showing up in your series whether you put them there or not. Roleplaying campaigns are stories, after all, and stories inherently reflect some part of the storyteller's personality. Don't force some hamhanded symbolic extrapolation, though: players don't show up to play representations of the id and superego, they show up to play a crusty doctor and a disciplined Vulcan scientist. Without micromanaging it, larger symbolic parallels will emerge if your stories are real and meaningful.

Smaller elements of symbolism, on the other hand, are relatively easy to insert into the ongoing narrative. Something can be as rudimentary as making a hot-headed NPC security officer a redhead or as subtle as making a particularly loyal subordinate a native of a planet orbiting Sirius (the "Dog Star"). These little touches can add a surprising amount to your games. Players subconsciously pick up on the clues, building a coherent undercurrent that makes your story seem more alive, deeper and yet more accessible. Even obvious symbolism can be a useful way of giving the players information in shorthand that can inform and deepen their understanding of the rest of the episode.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is the symbolic introduction of some element earlier in the story than its main appearance occurs. Some object later on in the plot "casts its shadow" into the story before it actually shows up. Authors and scriptwriters use foreshadowing to give the audience a first taste of the story line ahead, or to hint at the tale's resolution. In roleplaying, sometimes players are intended to spot the foreshadowing ahead of time to give an important later clue or set up some feeling of suspense. Of course, as with cut scenes, some players have difficulty playing their characters as though they had no such advance warning. Other times, the foreshadowing is intended as a mysterious or seemingly meaningless filler event that only makes sense in retrospect. Foreshadowing is a potentially powerful tool for bringing stories into elegant thematic focus, but it can be difficult to introduce without derailing the plot or spoiling the climax.

Foreshadowing can be very minimal at first. A simple passing mention of Melville early in *Star Trek: First Contact* foreshadows Picard's obsessive struggle to recapture the Enterprise from the Borg. This is the kind of foreshadowing that anyone watching the film (or playing a game with a similar element) will immediately recognize at the time.

Classical literary allusions often foreshadow the development of the main plot in *Star Trek* episodes and serve clear notice ahead of time. This kind of foreshadowing is relatively easy to work into a roleplaying game episode. If the Narrator intends the episode's theme to revolve around alien contact turned hostile, for example, mentioning the *U.S.S. Wells* or noting that Admiral Keyless was born on Mars (or in New Jersey) can foreshadow an upcoming "war of the worlds." Since the Narrator has near total control over the subject or theme of the upcoming episode, this kind of foreshadowing almost always works.

More obscurely, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* contains a very subtle foreshadowing that only becomes clear in retrospect. In the opening *Kobayashi Maru* sequence, after Lt. Saavik's disastrous failure has been revealed to be only part of a training exercise, Kirk enters the bridge and asks Captain Spock "Aren't you dead?" Audiences at the time see that only as a piece of byplay, but when Spock dies at the climax of the film, the foreshadowing returns as ironic harbinger. This kind of foreshadowing can be extremely tricky to set up in advance without blowing the surprise. If the Narrator intends for the episode to climax with the captain destroying the ship to keep it out of enemy hands, for example, a scene in the introduction might depict the model of the ship on the captain's desk falling off and breaking on the floor. Of course, nobody is going to miss something that obvious; it's hard to subtly work "Oh, by the way, you broke your ship model by accident." into the game narrative without metaphorically shooting up a giant flare and spoiling the plot climax. Thus alerted, the players may prevent the ship's destruction by their characters' bravery, skill or ingenuity; then the foreshadowing looks cheap and annoying.

Foreshadowing is wasted if nothing happens to bring it to life. Chekhov's Law (named after the Russian playwright, not the *Enterprise* navigator) says: "If you put a gun on the desk in Act One, you must fire it by Act Three." Don't set up some dramatic event or theme and not follow through. Players will be confused and irritated by the story if it doesn't seem to bring that foreshadowed element back into focus, even if the plot makes perfect sense otherwise. A foreshadowed event that doesn't occur becomes even worse than a loose end. Loose ends can eventually become the central plot of a future episode. It's tough to do that with a false start.

More importantly, though, don't derail the story or force the players into fulfilling some foreshadowed destiny against their will. There is nothing that some players hate more than being walked through some story they have no control over or input into, especially if the story winds up destroying something they value in the series (the ship, for example). Obviously foreshadowing a player character's death is perhaps the best possible way to leach the event of all meaning, unless the Narrator and that player have conspired earlier to let the character die gloriously. The element of surprise will still be gone, though, and the other players may doggedly persist in trying to save that character's life.

In short, foreshadowing is a powerful yet delicate tool that should be used subtly and minimally at first. Foreshadowing major events is far trickier and has much more potential to damage the game. Of course, if it works, it elevates the episode immediately to a higher, more rewarding plane of storytelling.

Dream Sequences

Aside from Data's dream in "Phantasms," and perhaps a few stray Betazoid visions, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* doesn't make a lot of use of dream sequences. Dream sequences are often places to insert foreshadowing or simply symbolically recapitulate some internal crisis. Many introspective stories could potentially involve dream sequences which give some light on the character's mental or emotional state.

As such, dream sequences usually work best when narrated in rich terms, but without slowing the game down or making the players distracted. Think of the dream sequence as a very specialized cut scene. Dream sequences can occur while the character is sleeping, daydreaming, feverish with delirium or under some sort of hypnosis. Precognitive characters may receive their visions of the future in dreams, which leads to all the same problems as other kinds of flashforwards (p. 38). It's always possible to roleplay a dream sequence without telling the players that it's a dream sequence, but the "it was all a dream" ending to those scenes rubs many players the wrong way. Once again, feeling like they've wasted their time, or that they have no control over their character's internal life, can make players dissociate from the game and become apathetic.

The holodeck offers an interesting alternative to more traditional dream sequences. Rather than an episode where one character dreams that everyone is actually a crew on a pirate ship, for example, just run the same daydream or fantasy as a holodeck episode. This lets the

players control their characters even in the most ludicrous "dream" situations, and can be a lot of fun as well as an interesting insight into the "dreaming" character's mind.

Stored holodeck programs, such as Barclay's fantasies of victory over the Three Musketeers or La Forge's simulated romance with Dr. Leah Brahms, can also serve to illuminate the inner emotional and mental state of a character (or NPC). Allowing the players to take the part of the holograms (or their own simulated replicas, as in a situation like Barclay's) will seem more like a flashback sequence. As with a flashback, the Narrator should explain what story the simulation is programmed to tell and then let the players roleplay it out while remaining within the larger plot constraints. This can be a more entertaining version of the traditional "dream sequence," and one that is much more true to the *Star Trek* feel.

Gaming Techniques

These techniques have less to do with the style of narration or with dramatic techniques than with making the game session work well for everyone, flow smoothly and arrive at a somewhat reasonable and satisfying climax. Go ahead and read this whole section even if you don't intend to use these techniques at first; it's better to be forewarned when something comes up.

Improvisation

The Narrator has spent hours coming up with the perfect story line for this week's episode. Setting, NPCs, theme and subtle touches of foreshadowing and symbolism build to a perfect climax. Everything works and reinforces a great *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* experience. The players have swallowed the hook in the introduction, taken the bait and everything is going perfectly. This, of course, is where things always fall apart. The players get distracted by the subplot, or by some totally random red herring, or piece of the scenery description and head off across the galaxy on a wild goose chase.

What then? First, it's not always impossible to get the game back on track. Figure out the shortest route from the current scene to the climax and start herding the players back in that direction. Rewrite the subplot climax on the fly to jump back into the main plot, or start laying a series of clues that point back to the conclusion. The Narrator shouldn't let the players know that they've derailed the adventure; just keep running scenes and keep pointing back to the real story line. Subtlety is the key here; don't just have Q show up and teleport the Crew back into the original episode plot. (Of course, if the original episode plot involved Q, your problems are over.) Don't get so attached to your story that you force the players into a foreordained rut without any power. No episode is so good that it's worth risking the game over. Complaining that the game is ruined or hammering the players with obviously-scripted coercion will make the players alienated and even less cooperative. They showed up, after all, for interactive entertainment; if they wanted to just watch a preordained plot passively unfold, they could have stayed home with a *Star Trek* novel.

Another possibility is to just follow the players' lead. If they seem excited and compelled by their red herring or subplot, let them play it out. Make that the central story line; build other characters into it and tie it into ongoing series background. Sometimes the players never find out that they were actually pursuing a red herring. Players are ingenious, and it's a shame to punish them for cleverly thinking about the story even if they're ingeniously wrong. As long as it doesn't destroy the plot completely, if the hidden artifact is actually on Vulcan, but the players are certain that it's on Romulus, just scratch out "Vulcan" on your episode notes and put in "Romulus." You can always throw in a fight scene or a detailed bit of roleplaying while you figure out how to rewrite the plot retroactively. Some Narrators are known for only planning the setup or introduction to a puzzle or mystery plot and simply writing the confrontation, climax and solution "ten minutes ahead" of the players. With creative, imaginative players this kind of thing works surprisingly well. Listen to their discussions as they try to figure out "what's really going on." Pick the best or most original-sounding idea a player comes up with and quietly decide that that's what's really going on. Once events point that way, you can be fairly confident that that particular player will be able to follow up the clues that he unknowingly laid!

Or, the players might suddenly figure everything out, jump to the climax, solve the whole episode in an hour and ask what happens next. The first thing to do in this case is to look for a second climax behind the first one. Let's say they've figured out the Obsidian Order's plan, defeated the Cardassians and run their spies off a new planet, in record time. Don't let all the planning you've done setting up that planet go to waste. Perhaps the planetary government starts pestering the Crew to solve all their problems — and

hinting that if they don't come across with the cure for cancer and the secret to warp drive, the Cardassians are just a subspace call away. Many episodes seem to naturally set up sequels anyway; just think this one out for a bit and begin the next logical story. If no sequel immediately presents itself, pull out an introspective story or a holodeck adventure and just enjoy roleplaying with no real goal in mind.

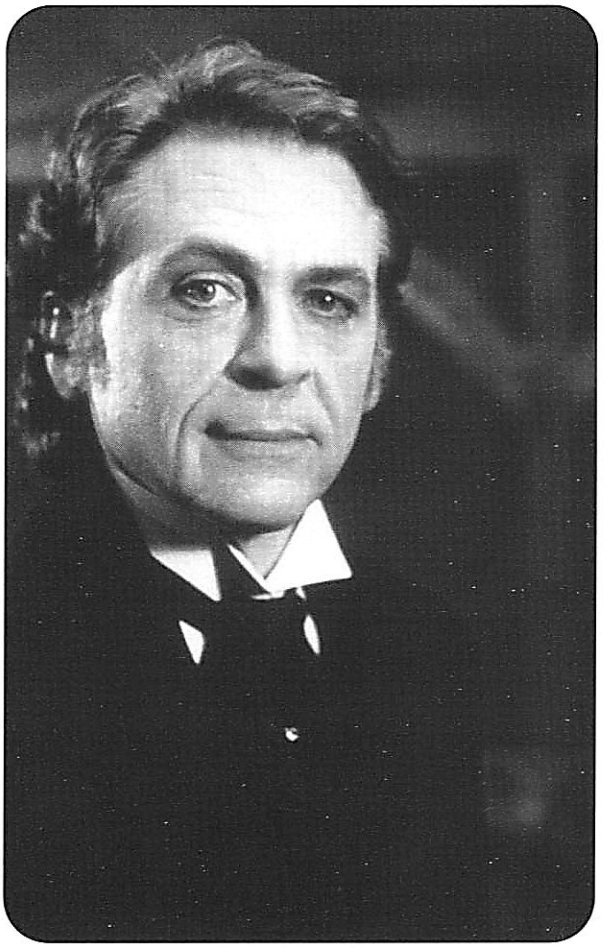
Whether it's rewriting the confrontation, switching the climax or even running an entire follow-up episode on a wing and a prayer, the Narrator will need the essential roleplaying skill of improvisation. Improvisation becomes easier with familiarity with the background universe. If you know a lot about *Star Trek*, for example, you are more likely to have a good guess about what happens in the *Star Trek* universe under even the most bizarre sort of circumstances. Another thing that helps improvisation is having a lot of simultaneous plot arcs going on in the background. Something that no longer fits in the episode you planned to tell can sometimes be worked into the back story for some other episode entirely: rather than the murder mystery on Vulcan plot arc, it becomes part of the *Tal Shiar* infiltration plot arc, or the mind parasite conspiracy plot arc. Knowing your players and their characters can let you improvise stories that they will enjoy playing even if they're not quite as well-developed as the original episode was. A good time goes a long way to cover up plot holes.

Another key to improvising is just the exercise of writing and narrating a lot of roleplaying game episodes. The more you practice, the less time it will take you to develop the next story. Eventually, telling a satisfying and enjoyable impromptu story is not a lot harder than coming up with a fully-scripted episode. Improvisation is a difficult skill, but it's too useful for Narrators to neglect it.

Using Your Own Rules

Some Narrators might not feel that the rules presented in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* rulebooks or supplements correspond with their vision of what makes a good game. They may have some other roleplaying game system they prefer to use and take only the setting and universe from *Star Trek*. Often, Narrators tweak rules within a game; some Narrators may feel, for example, that phaser combat is too deadly, character advancement is too rapid, or Vulcans aren't strong enough. The Narrator might even ignore actual facts on the ground: if the Narrator thinks that Vulcan is too far from Earth, that's okay. Move it; it's an imaginary planet, after all, and it is your game.

Along those same lines, there comes a time in many roleplaying games to bend the rules just a little bit to get the plot moving or to prevent some awful disaster. If the player of the First Officer fails that dodge roll on a freak die tumble and gets disintegrated, that stops the episode dead. Feel free to say that the Cardassian's phaser bolt missed and disintegrated part of the shuttlecraft instead. As a rule of thumb, fudging that helps the Crew or makes the climax possible is okay, as long as nobody but the Narrator knows that it happened. That, after all, is why this Toolkit includes a Narrator's Screen to roll the dice behind. Some players don't mind knowing that their characters have "script immunity." They know nothing will kill them, because they're the series regulars, after all. Other players prefer to have that knowledge hidden from their conscious mind, even if



subconsciously they know that all those lucky breaks might have a little Narrator intervention behind them. Of course, if the player does something really stupid and abuses script immunity, it's okay to fudge a roll to punish them for that, too, as long as it's a secret. "Oh, looks like the Romulan ambassador's bodyguards all made their disruptor rolls. You drop like a rag doll, stunned many times over."

Sometimes the rules get in the way of the plot. Due to the relatively high degree of detail in combat rules, for example, a simple encounter can become a major climax simply by becoming a combat sequence. What the Narrator intended to be a tense roleplaying scene in a shoreside bar can become an immense tavern brawl, dragging in starship security, planetary police and any other offworlder forces handy. Never surrender, or say that it didn't happen: improvise (see Improvisation, p. 42) and move on. But make sure that you are ready to deal with a situation the rules will throw at you. If you must, simply narrate a minor combat to prevent the situation from escalating: players will be annoyed at not getting to participate, but that may be less dangerous to your game than derailing the plot every four scenes for a giant fight scene.

Keep in mind, finally, that this is your game to run as Narrator. You have to make sure that the players are reasonably comfortable with whatever rules or rules changes that you use (or leave out). At the same time, you owe it to those same players to keep the game moving and to present the episode in such a way that its drama isn't occasionally drowned in dice rolling.



Troublesome Players

Not all players are always sweetness and light to deal with, hard as that may be to believe. Some players just don't get the point; they never seem to understand the rudiments of roleplaying, never pick up on any hints or clues, never understand the plot and act like they wish they were watching a movie instead. Others use the game sessions to further some personal agenda; they carry on feuds, romances, unrelated conversations or other distracting personal interactions with other players or bystanders at the expense of the game. Still other players take everything too personally: every fight that goes wrong is a conspiracy by the Narrator, every clue they missed was stupid and irrelevant, every good thing that another player gets or does was their idea or their just reward instead. These kinds of players can destroy the game for everyone if they aren't brought into line. Unfortunately, it's the Narrator's responsibility to handle them. Sometimes, the other players will ask the Narrator to act; at other times, the Narrator has to act before everyone else gets so irritated that they stop showing up at the game.

Start by taking the problem player aside and mentioning the problem with the game. Do this in a very matter-of-fact, nonconfrontational way. Don't say "Your playing stinks." Say something like "It's easier for the other players to get into the game if you make an effort to follow the story line, too." If they don't shape up after one or two talks; it might be time to ask another player to take a hand, especially if they're a personal friend of the problem player. In the final analysis, though, those players may have to be asked to leave the game to avoid spoiling everyone else's good time.

Some players, although enthusiastic and capable roleplayers with no out-of-game agenda, simply don't want to play *Star Trek* by the standards of Starfleet. They torture prisoners, level alien cities to rescue crewmen, go into every situation packing phaser rifles, rewire the transporter and medical nanites to make endless clones of themselves in case of injury, and similarly act "out of paradigm." These players can be squelched in-character by their superior officers (do not let such a player play the

captain, by any means), by Starfleet or by any other means in the game up to and including a messy death at the hands of Armus or the Obsidian Order.

If the "in game" hint doesn't take, try talking to the player alone out of the game context. Explain that you're trying to keep the series feeling more like *Star Trek* and less like other roleplaying games where the object is to kill monsters and get treasure. Sometimes, the player will realize what you mean and make a real attempt to play along. Go easy on him for the first few episodes; it's hard to unlearn bad habits, especially when they're good habits in other games. Some of those players can happily compromise by playing an over-eager security chief who lives by Worf's credo that it never hurts to arm phasers first, but is usually overruled by calmer heads on the bridge. However, if that doesn't work, there's sadly no option but to minimize his role until he leaves the game himself.

Of course, if everyone is having fun, including the Narrator, it doesn't matter what some outsider might think of your players, their attitudes toward the Vulcans or their gung-ho disregard for the Prime Directive. Just tell yourself it's a parallel universe, and make warp factor ten for the Neutral Zone, all phasers on full and damn the photon torpedoes!

Rewards and Applause

One way to keep good players coming back, encourage the less skilled players to show good roleplaying and decision making, and give everyone some of the extra benefits of interactive entertainment is to regularly reward good play. Experience points are a big part of this; it should be generally understood that an extra point or two is always waiting for exceptional roleplayers.

Less mechanically, just make sure to praise good players or good play where everyone can see. It means a lot to players if the Narrator throws back her head and laughs at some inspired piece of in-character byplay, whistles softly when the player comes up with some slick combat maneuver, or gives everyone a round of applause after a taut, well-played climax. If the players add to your enjoyment of the game, make sure they know it! Don't wait until the game is over to tell them how much fun it is for you to narrate them; good players like to be told they're good, and regular rewards help inspire players to aim for new heights.

Finally, it may seem cynical and Pavlovian, but keep a bag of goodies nearby for rewarding some minor good idea or brief moment of character acting. Tossing the players a piece of candy is a quick, cheap reward that everyone will enjoy. Plus, with that sugar in their systems, they'll be more excited about the game.

Lighting and Music

Many gaming groups regularly employ music and lights to enhance the atmosphere of the game. Even something as simple as starting every session by playing the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* theme on a boom box can get people keyed up to play *Star Trek*. It lets them know that the game has begun, that it's going to be dramatic and exciting, and it stirs up all those old (or new) memories of watching the show.

During the game, playing soundtracks from the various *Star Trek* movies can keep that mood going. Soundtracks from other action, adventure or science fiction films and TV shows can also help build that cinematic mood on which *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* sessions depend so heavily.

You can even tailor the piece to the specific episode. If it's a story with a lot of space combat, something rollicking or heroic from *Star Trek II: Wrath of Khan* might be ideal. If it's more of a deep and introspective story, some slower, more methodical *Star Trek: The*



Motion Picture music might be better. Play a sad song when a character dies, or a fast-paced classical or action theme during fight scenes. Sound effects can work here, as well; many record stores sell CDs of rainforest sounds, swamp noises, rainstorms, etc. Play a thunderstorm CD while the characters visit Ferenginar, whalesong on an ocean planet, wind noises on Vulcan, etc. Try to avoid music with lyrics (especially inappropriate ones) that will distract from the story you're telling.

Lighting can work the same way. When the ship goes on red alert or the characters beam down to *Qo'noS*, switch to a lamp with a red bulb. For suspenseful scenes, turn the lights down; for happy endings turn them back up. A moody episode patterned after "Sub Rosa" might work best by candlelight, even. As long as everyone can read their character sheets and the dice, and you can read your episode notes, lighting changes can really enhance the game.

Props

Props are real objects that the players can look at and handle. They represent the objects that their characters are using or encountering during the episode. For some reason, giving the players an object to touch or look at really brings them into the game in a way that the most ornate, meaningful and emotional description can't match. It's also a time saver if you can just hand the players a prop and say "It looks like this" rather than having to describe some alien spacecraft or artifact. Having a visual representation there helps prevent miscommunication, and can even spark player ideas.



The simplest kind of prop is a player handout. These are just drawings or text printouts that contain information about some event in the episode. Rather than describing the tactical situation as two Romulan warbirds decloak around the ship, the Narrator can save time and build drama by producing a mock-up sensor readout showing the position of the two ships relative to the Crew's starship. Maps can also work to build player understanding, especially of tactical situations for action scenes or of the lay of the land for investigative and exploratory ones. Even text printouts can save time and become a resource for players to refer to while they try to figure out what's going on. Rather than risk the players missing some crucial clue in the introduction, writing it into a printout and giving it to the players ensures that they'll have it in front of them when they need it. The back of this book contains some sample handouts, and future adventures will often contain handouts for the various episodes.

Narrators can also draw handouts using colored pens or markers, or type up or write out printouts of computer data on some new planet or ancient culture. Another type of handout that Narrators can use is a picture; saying "The planetary administrator looks like this" and passing across a photo can build a real, immediate impression. Narrators can get photos from *Star Trek* books, celebrity magazines, old copies of Life or National Geographic or the wallets of family members. Narrators with access to a computer and image-altering software can even turn them into photos of aliens!

Three-dimensional props can be even more fun. Phasers and tricorders are common, and alien equipment is even more interestingly enigmatic if it's sitting right there on the table. These props can also help maintain NPC identity; if the Cardassian envoy is always toying with his ceremonial dagger, the players will have another visual cue when the Narrator picks up the prop dagger and they'll know who they're dealing with. With enough artistic bent and enough time and dedication, you can even build an impressive-looking *tox uthat* or Kurlan artifact.

Narrators who don't have the time or talent to build their devices can find a wide range of *Star Trek* paraphernalia on sale at conventions or in toy and hobby stores. Playmates makes phasers, tricorders and similar gadgets with

working lights and cool noises. Other companies make communicator pins or Starfleet uniforms. Although sitting around the game table with everyone in uniform (or full Klingon makeup!), actually using toy tricorders to "scan" things and tapping a bleeping communicator badge to talk in character may be a little more immersive than some groups want to get, it can undeniably add atmosphere, and even fun, to the roleplaying experience.



Hide and Q

This *Star Trek* episode is directly based on the first season *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode "Hide and Q," written by C.J. Holland and Gene Roddenberry. If your players have seen that episode, it may be difficult for them to avoid using player knowledge to predict the plot development of this adventure. Even experienced roleplayers can find it hard to maintain this avoidance, or "firewalling." If you simply wish to introduce the Q into your campaign, and you can count on the players' restraint, this will still work as such an introduction, whether your players have watched the episode or not. If you feel that surprise or tension are more important to your game, you may wish to narrate a different adventure instead.

ATTENTION PLAYERS: **Don't read any further! This section contains information about an episode that your Narrator may choose to run during your series; knowing too much about it could spoil your enjoyment.**

Narrator's Summary

In this episode, a member of the Q continuum (either the same Q who interfered with the mission of the *Enterprise-D* to Farpoint or another) decides to test humankind further by giving one human (a player character member of the Crew) the powers of the Q. If the human embraces his new powers as "Crew Q," it will show that even elite humans can easily be swayed by bribery, and the Crew Q will be assimilated into the Q Continuum, where his knowledge and insights can inform the Q of the human threat eons hence. If the human rejects the offer of Q power, the Q will know that humanity is not easily diverted from its destiny. This episode can serve to introduce the Q into your series as a combined menace and mystery, much as Q was in the television series. The episode itself is very much a moral dilemma episode: what to do with the powers of a god, and can such power be used without destroying the recipient?

Narrators should be very careful when running this episode. Giving a human (and a player) the power of the Q can open up a very large can of worms indeed. The Crew Q can radically alter the series universe by an act of will: at the end of this episode (p. 54) we have given you some "emergency brakes" to use if things get too out of hand, but narrating this episode means assuming some risk. For this reason, this episode is fairly straightforward with no subplots or other potentially confusing story elements.

Act One: The Introduction

The Crew's starship is en route at high warp (e.g. warp 9.1) to the Federation mining colony at Quadra Sigma III, which has suffered a catastrophic explosion. Information about the explosion is fragmentary, coming from a brief distress call. Ship's computer records show that the Quadra Sigma III mining colony lies almost entirely underground and holds 504 personnel there at last record (including children). A successful Geology or Material Engineering (Mining) check (Difficulty 4) or a successful Planetology check (Difficulty 6) reveals that the most likely cause of such an explosion is methane gas, plentiful in such subterranean mine chambers.

When the ship lies only 3.2 hours from the Quadra Sigma system, an enormous energy barrier appears in its path, braking it instantly. (Knowing that such an action violates the laws of physics is a Routine check on Physical Sciences or Engineering skills.) A successful Shipboard Systems (Sensors) or Computer (Research) check (Difficulty 5) identifies this energy barrier as a force field used by the denizens of the Q continuum (see the *What the Crew Already Knows About the Q* box). Regardless of anything the Crew attempts, the field holds the ship fast.

What the Crew Already Knows About the Q

At a minimum, the Crew's computer holds the logs and debriefings from the first contact between the Q and the *Enterprise-D* in 2364 during Captain Picard's mission to Farpoint Station at Deneb IV. Starfleet has made these records available to all starship captains (to share, at their discretion, with the command staff) because of the scale of the potential threat posed by the Q. If the Captain of this ship is an NPC, it is fair to assume that she briefs the Crew (or at least those in bridge command positions) of the nature of this energy grid and of the nature of the Q Continuum. At the Narrator's discretion, if this episode takes place much later than 2364, the whole Crew may have a fairly good notion of the powers and nature of the Q.

When all, or at least most, of the Crew are together discussing the situation (in the briefing room, on the bridge, or wherever), a glowing orb appears in midair, addressing the Crew (and any others in the room) in a mocking tone of voice. The orb has three projections equally spaced around it; they look something like cobra hoods. This, manifestly, is the Q. The dialogue given to the Q in this episode closely parallels the dialogue spoken by Q in the televised episode; if you intend your Q to have a different flavor (see the *Roleplaying Q* box), you may wish to adjust the language or tone.

Roleplaying Q

Roleplaying Q is surprisingly difficult. On the surface, it seems simple enough: you can do anything and you know it. However, Q is not just an arrogant bully. No player enjoys spending an episode listening to a Narrator bully her around; if that's all the Q are to you, don't introduce them. In the television series, Q presents an intellectual and moral challenge. He wants to help humanity transcend itself, while at the same time understand the nature of such flawed beings. The television Q needed humanity; viewers could pick up on that need and have sympathy for it even while being annoyed at his hijinks. Regardless of your Q's motivations, give your players a similar reason to care about the Q (a reason besides "the Q could turn all of you into Andorian ice newts so you'd better pay attention"). Make sure that, while narrating the Q's actions, you don't gloat or condescend to the players, or if you do, that you give it a theatrical enough tinge to amuse the players with the goings-on. Their characters, of course, may (and probably will) remain sullen and irked. As Narrator, remember that your job is to help everyone have fun: nobody has fun when they're the helpless victim all the time.

Another thing to try is personalizing your Q. Don't feel like your Q has to look and sound, or even act, just like actor John DeLancie. Part of the fun of the Q is their complete independence from human conventions or appearances, and part of the fun of roleplaying is that you, as Narrator, can cast anyone you wish (or any succession of people) as the Q. Think about your group, and about the purpose of this scenario. If you wish to play up the temptation of joining the Q, perhaps Q materializes looking like Marilyn Monroe or Erol Flynn; if you prefer a more blustery, arrogant Q he might appear more like Sir Lawrence Olivier. A more subtle temptation might be to play Q as a wise and tolerant Alastair Cooke. The possible range for Q is endless. In the series, the specific Q bedeviling the *Enterprise-D* enjoyed toying with humanity to teach them a lesson — for this reason, he kept the same form throughout. In your series, if that Q is more interested merely in testing humanity (or in some other goal), it's less important to keep the same "actor" for Q's later appearances.

The Q begins: "Humans! I thought by now that you would have scampered back to your own little star system." Regardless of the response, the Q continues: "We the Q have studied our recent contact with you, and are impressed. We have much to discuss, including perhaps the realization of your most impossible dream." This may be the truth (unlikely), a cunning half-truth (as it was on the show) or a pure lie, at the Narrator's discretion. Here, it is likely that someone will ask to be allowed to complete the ship's mission of mercy before engaging in any discussion with the Q. If no player asks, have an NPC (perhaps the ship's captain) demand it, to which the Q can respond: "You will abandon that mission. My business with you takes precedence. If my magnificence blinds you, then perhaps something more familiar." The glowing orb metamorphoses into a human dressed in the dress uniform of a

Starfleet Fleet Admiral. "Starfleet Admiral Q, at your service."

Act Two: The Confrontation

Nothing the Crew or Supporting Cast say or do can dissuade Q from his project. He seems intent on treating the whole proceeding as, consecutively, a triviality, an opportunity ("Do none of you realize your good fortune?") and a game. After some degree of back-and-forth ("But Q, people are suffering and dying!" "Your species is always suffering and dying.") Q declares the beginning of "a deadly game," and teleports the Crew Q (see *Which Crewmember To Pick*), and the rest of the Crew to what seems to be a Class M planet. The planet looks dry and rocky, with a green sky and two moons (one large red one and one small white one), but the short horizon line emphasizes the small size of the arena and the planet's "ad hoc" and "created" nature.

Which Crewmember to Pick

In the televised episode, Q selects Riker as the subject of his test after Riker expresses amusement at the Q's pronouncement. As Narrator, you can either preselect a player character to become the "Crew Q" or let the Crew's own actions select one for you. Preselecting works best if you have a player whose reactions you can trust not to horribly overbalance the game; in other words, one who will be likely to make the same choice Riker did (to reject the Q without making too many irreparable changes), or if you have a player whose character would benefit from just such a moral dilemma.

If you allow the Crew's actions to select the Crew Q for you, look for reactions beyond defiance and stubborn insistence. The televised Q valued amusement and mocking humor (perhaps Riker's reaction reminded him of his own reaction to humans); what does your Q value? It is unlikely to be emotional appeal, or any reaction that depends on human importance. Irony, calm acceptance, bargaining or other non-defensive reactions may spark the Q to choose. Since the point of the exercise is to test humanity, though, the Crew Q should be human or Centauran, if at all possible. (The Q know, for example, how Vulcans will choose: logically.) Perhaps your Q, like the televised Q, will choose the first human to use the word "game" in response to "good fortune", or perhaps your Q has a different "code word" that he's looking for: "adventure," or "chance" or even "joke."

At the Narrator's discretion, the ship's captain (if he is a player character) might be left alone on the bridge in a temporal stasis field, unable even to make a log entry. If your players are experienced roleplayers capable of splitting their attention, this might build a degree of tension. If the captain is an NPC, or if you are narrating this episode for newer players, leave the action centered on the planet.

On the planet, give the players a couple of minutes to try contacting the ship (it doesn't respond, of course), looking around, etc. before Q's arrival. When Q shows up, he wears the uniform of a French Imperial Marshal from Earth's Napoleonic Era (1794-1814). In the TV episode, Q says he took his costume and appearance from Picard's mind: as Narrator, you might take your Q's costume from another period that interests your characters (Crew or Supporting Cast) more. If the Crew's captain is of Greek descent rather than French, then perhaps Q takes on the gilded armor and white-plumed helmet of Alexander the Great, and the piglike monsters (see below) might be garbed as spear-carrying Greek hoplites. Depending on your intentions as Narrator, Q might appear in this scene as a Chinese mandarin, a Prussian commandant from World War One, a Japanese samurai daimyo, Robert E. Lee, or any other figure of martial glory.



Near Q, the Crew suddenly sees a Napoleonic field tent (History (Human) check at Difficulty 9 to identify) glistening with martial braid and decorated with 19th-century luxuries and furniture (if you have changed the imagery in your game, change the tent to match it, obviously). Should any of the players comment (or even discuss the nature of the decor with each other), Q explains: "I borrowed this from your stodgy captain's mind. This is the dressing for a game that we will play. Games require rules, and dangers, and rewards, familiar settings, that sort of thing." Q will invite the chosen Crew Q to join him in the tent: "Join me, [Crew Q's name]. A good game needs rules and planning. Wasn't it your own Hartley who said, 'Nothing reveals humanity so well as the games it plays?' Almost right. Actually, you reveal yourself best in *how* you play." Q will offer drinks to the chosen Crewmember ("Whatever you desire."), and settle in to explain himself further. Q will only mock and poke fun at the other Crewmembers at this point; the game has not yet officially begun.

"It's the human future which intrigues us," Q begins. "And it should concern you the most. You see, of all the species, yours cannot abide stagnation. Change is at the heart of what you are. But change into what? That is the question. That is what we shall test today." Q ignores the other members of the Crew; any wandering around or exploring they do brings them right back to Q's tent without discovering anything. Meanwhile, Q brags on, annoyingly: "Shall it be a test of strength? Meaningless, since you have none. A test of intelligence? Equally meaningless. But it needs risk! Something to win and something to lose. To win: the greatest possible future that you can imagine. Which of course requires something totally disastrous if you are to lose. Now the point of this game shall be: can any of you stay alive?" Now, the game begins. (But see *The Point of the Game*.)

The first character (aside from the Crew Q) to protest violently (draw a phaser, step forward in aggressive posture, shout angrily or threateningly) vanishes immediately thereafter as Q declares a "Game penalty!" To use a 20th-century term, she's in a penalty box. Where she will remain, unharmed, unless one of you merits a penalty. Unfortunately, there's only one penalty box. If any of you should be sent there, your crewmate must give the box up to you... into nothingness. I entreat you to carefully obey the rules of the game." Should any player protest that it's unfair to send someone to a penalty box without explaining the rules, Q responds: "Fairness is such a human concept. Think imaginatively. This game shall be... completely unfair!" This, believe it or not, is an important clue that the actual game is not the one taking place on the planet, but the one between Q and the Crew Q. Should no player character act aggressively, the Narrator can arbitrarily send any character to the penalty box for any reason: talking out of turn, moving out of the game area or any similar infraction of the nonexistent rules. If the captain is a player character, there isn't even a need for a penalty box, and the game can move on to the next phase.

The Point Of The Game

There is no point to Q's game, actually. The entire thing is a charade to convince the chosen Crewmember to accept the powers of the Q. Nothing the players can do can win the game as Q describes it; the piglike monsters are undefeatable and the "penalty box" is meaningless except as a demonstration of the power of the Q (or an opportunity for a lone character to wager the Q as detailed below). The only way to win the game is to discover Q's true intentions, and wager on the true outcome: whether the Crew Q will reject or accept the powers of the Q continuum. The Narrator should give one player, either the player of the highest-ranking character (besides the chosen Crewmember) or the player of the Crewmember in the "penalty box" a chance to make this wager.

This chance occurs when the potentially-wagering character is alone (either in the penalty box or transported to the timestopped bridge). It might be best to leave the room with the player of the wagering character; it will interfere with the Crew Q's choice to hear about the wager beforehand. Q appears to gloat over humanity's failure: "The Crew plays out a game — whose real intent is to test whether [the Crew Q] is worthy of the greatest gift the Q can offer." This, of course, is either a lie or a half-truth, but it leads to the opportunity to bet that the Crew Q will reject such a gift if offered. Once such a bet is offered, Q sets the stakes: "Your starship against..." Here, the ideal response is "your leaving us alone to continue our mission," but anything that doesn't totally unbalance the game will probably work. The Q can always welch on the bet if things wind up too ridiculous. As Narrator, you should try to goad or maneuver the player into betting, and into betting correctly. This can be difficult, but without this side bet, the episode loses much of its dramatic tension. Once the bet is made, Q gets the last word: "You've already lost. [Crew Q's name] will be offered something — impossible to refuse." After the wager, though, Q will likely declare "Penalty over."

It is now that exploring characters can discover an encampment of piglike monsters (see their traits, below) one or two ridges away. Whether the Crew reacts violently or not, the piglike monsters will attack once they have numerical superiority (since they are creations of Q, there are effectively an infinite amount of them, although only 20 or so appear at any given time). The piglike monsters will do their best to kill the Crew, and will probably be able to seriously wound

or kill at least one Crewmember before the Crew Q can intervene. (For extra dramatic tension, it might be a good idea for a Crewmember to die in the piglike monsters' final onrush.) If the Crew Q steps into the fray, one of the monsters' blaster beams dissolves against him, even though they are dangerous (or fatal) to humans. Either then, or if the Crew Q asks the Q to intervene or send the Crew back to the ship, Q reveals his action: "Send them [or save them] the same way I do. I've given you the power. Do you understand? I've given you the power of the Q. Use it."

Piglike Monster-Pawns Of Q

These creatures resemble humanoid warthogs; their folded and rubbery faces bristle with tufts of rank fur and yellowing tusks. Their splayed paws can clutch their seemingly-primitive weaponry without trouble, and they are garbed in archaic historical uniforms. As created beings, they all have the same attributes and skills.

Fitness 4
- Strength +2
- Vitality +2

Coordination 3
- Reaction +1

Intellect 2
- Perception +2

Presence 2
Psi 0
Athletics (Running) 3(4)
Dodge 3
Energy Weapon (Disguised Energy Weapon) 3(4)
Planetary Tactics (Small Unit) 2(3)
Primitive Weaponry (Bayonet/Rifle Butt) 3(4)
Search 3
Stealth (Stealthy Movement) 2(3)
Unarmed Combat (Brawling) 2(3)
Weapons: Treat the piglike monster-pawns' disguised energy weapons as phasers set on 10. If your Q has created pawns with other than Napoleonic arms, replace the Primitive Weaponry specialization with an appropriate one: katana for piglike samurai, etc. Regardless of their appearance, the pawns' weapons still serve as disguised energy weapons.

At this point, much depends on the actions of the Crew Q. The battle, and the fate of the rest of the Crew, are literally in his hands. Whether he decimates the piglike monsters, puts up an impenetrable force field or transports the rest of the Crew back to the ship, he has to use the power of the Q to save his teammates. In the very unlikely case that the player immediately rejects the power of the Q, the Q will either select another Crewmember (if the bet has not been made) or leave immediately (if the bet has been made). It is up to the Narrator whether any Crewmembers killed by the piglike aliens stay dead under those circumstances; on the one hand, it makes the Crew Q's choice a real one, with real consequences, but on the other hand, it's incredibly unfair to the dead character's player.

Most likely, however, the Crew Q will accept his powers, at least long enough to win the battle. (The Crew Q can also restore anyone from the penalty box or from nothingness.) Having done that, Q returns everyone to the ship except the Crew Q, to whom he unburdens yet more of his reasoning: "We have offered you a gift. Beyond all other gifts." (Note that the Crew Q, even if he has used his powers, has not yet technically accepted this gift: accepting it will result in the Crew Q immediately joining the Q Continuum and becoming an NPC.) "At Farpoint, we saw humans as savages only. We discovered instead that you are unusual creatures. In your own, limited ways. Ways which in time will not be so limited." Here, Q may or may not be



lying: it's up to the Narrator whether this is happy talk meant to lull the Crew Q into selling out humanity by joining the Q or, as it seemed to be in the televised episode, a genuine motive on Q's part. "Your human compulsion to learn, to explore is a power which will grow stronger, century after century, eon after eon. Perhaps in the future that you cannot yet conceive, you will advance even beyond us. So you see, we must know more about this human compulsion. That's why we've selected you, [Crew Q's name], to become part of the Q. So that you can bring to us this human need and hunger that we may better understand it." If the Crew Q tries to use the powers of the Q against Q in any way, of course, nothing happens. This includes, of course, scanning the mind of Q to tell if he's lying about his motives. "Q cannot affect Q any more than water can drench itself."

After this conversation, Q allows the Crew Q to return to the ship. Here, the Narrator may want to allow humanity to make its case: perhaps one or more of the other Crew may urge the Crew Q to reject this gift rather than play with fire. Q will allow this, contemptuous of human arguments and human frailty, but will not allow the character who made the bet with Q to tell the Crew Q about the wager. If no member of the Crew steps forward, one of the Supporting Cast such as the captain or the Ship's Counselor might try to urge the Crew Q to remember his humanity, remember the adage that "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," or any other arguments the Narrator feels would be enough to set up a genuine choice in the Crew Q player's mind.

Act Three: The Resolution

It is after both Q and humanity have made their arguments that the ship arrives at Quadra Sigma III. The methane explosion is deadly; only a scattered few survivors remain, trapped under rubble and fallen mineshafts. Medical checks are Challenging at best to save these unfortunates. The Crew Q, of course, could save all of them, and even bring the dead miners (and their children) back to life. Poignantly narrate this tragedy, emphasizing that "if the ship had only arrived an hour earlier, we could have saved ten times the number of people we did." Make sure that, if the Crew Q leaves the miners dead, that it's a real character choice and not the player being apathetic to a bunch of extras. If the ship's Medical Officer is an NPC, she should argue strongly in favor of saving lives, regardless of the cost: medical ethics are quite clear. (If the Crew Q is also the Medical Officer, the Narrator can feel free to point this out.)



The dead of Quadra Sigma III may spark a degree of interparty conflict: one faction of players may think that the emergency justifies using the Crew Q's gift, others may not. Only the Crew Q can decide, however. At the height of the discussion, Q reappears, asking "Are these truly your friends, Brother?" Assuming that some player or players wish the Crew Q to reject the power, and say so at this point, Q will respond: "The truly evil part of all this is your jealousy. You offer [Crew Q's name] jealousy. What I offer him is clearly beyond your comprehension. How can you claim friendship for [Crew Q's name], while obstructing his way to the greatest adventure ever offered a human?" Note that by using the word "human" and the Crew Q's name, Q still tacitly admits that the question is open. What Q wants here is for the Crew Q to do something irrevocable, and selfishly arrogant, with the power; to truly become a Q. Even doing a friend a favor (besides, one assumes, saving her life from malevolent piglike aliens) becomes, at least partially, a self-aggrandizing, arrogant act — much like a billionaire giving a dollar to a homeless man.

This is where Q will strike the Crew Q's vanity, through his charity: "You love each

one of your people. Demonstrate it. You have the power to leave each one of them with a gift proving your affection." Here Q makes everything clear. The Crew Q will be "leaving" humanity, and the gift, rather than offered generously, exists only to "prove his affection." This, then, is where the Crew Q must decide. As Narrator, you have some outs. Hopefully, this phrase about "leaving each one of your people with a gift" will concentrate the Crew Q's mind on personal gifts such as curing illnesses, granting psionic powers or super-strength, or similar things, rather than cosmic-level gifts such as disintegrating the entire Cardassian Navy or giving everyone in the Federation the powers of the Q (but, just in case, see the *Emergency Brakes* box).

When the Crew Q grants gifts to the player characters, be sure to ask the recipient's player some leading question like "Do you accept this gift from the Q?" or even "Are you sure that you want to accept Q's offer?" Hopefully, as in the series, the rest of the Crew will remain staunchly on the side of humanity and reject these gifts. Award any character who rejects a gift 2 "refresher" Courage Points (or more, for rejecting a major gift like cured blindness) — either now (to bribe the other players) or at the end of the scene. It's up to you whether any Crewmember who decides to keep his gift suffers any kind of negative result (or if the Crew Q gifts vanish either with the Crew Q's assimilation or with his return to humanity). Let the logic of the story guide you; if it wouldn't horribly unbalance the game, or if it seems like cheap gimmickry to take the gift back "just because," then go right ahead with it. On the other hand, if the gifts would unbalance the game or spoil the enjoyment of you or the players, feel free to have those lying Q return everything to "normal" just to spite humanity.

Finally, it all comes down to the Crew Q. If he accepts the gift of the Q, Q embraces him and they assimilate together into the Q Continuum. The Crew Q becomes an NPC, and the player needs to generate another character. It's up to you whether the Crew Q shows up next time the Crew encounters the Q, or if they never hear from him again. Either way, the Q become more contemptuous of humans — they can be bribed and bought off; any threat they pose can be countered since the Q have a pet human of their own to study. If he rejects the gift of the Q, and the wager is in force, the Q can be forced to leave the bridge (dragged off by an irate beam of white light, perhaps). If the Crew Q rejects the gift, but there was no side wager, Q will announce "The next one won't" and vanish triumphantly. Whether this is a hollow threat is up to the Narrator to decide.

Emergency Brakes

If the Crew Q does something cosmic like destroy the Borg or turn all the Romulans into Vulcans, you have two fairly unpalatable choices: let those changes stand and play with a distorted game, or assimilate the Crew Q and have the Q Continuum "reverse time" and restart it from a time before the Crew Q made his changes. (The Q would have no reason to do that, but they're the Q; they don't need reasons.)

It will be up to you as Narrator whether the Crew Q character remains part of this new timeline; he will be an NPC if he shows up again as a Q, but you may feel that losing a character is harsh punishment for choosing incorrectly in this episode. It might not be completely remiss to allow the Q to reject the Crew Q (or replicate him perfectly) leaving the Crewmember a mere human, back on the ship and with none of the Crew but him remembering anything of what transpired.

Experience Points

When assigning Experience Points, remember that negative awards should be deducted from the total number of points given out. They are never removed from already-earned Experience Points.

For every Crewmember who actively addressed the dilemmas and issues of this episode: +1

For every Crewmember who treated the episode as a foregone conclusion: -1

For the Crewmember who made the wager: +1

For the Crew Q, if he rejected the Q's offer: +1

For any other Crewmember whose player roleplayed exceptionally well: +1

Renown

For the Crewmember who made the wager: +1 Initiative

For any Crewmember who offered violence to Q: +1 Aggression

For any Crewmember who rejected a Crew Q gift: +1 Discipline

For the Crew Q, if he rejected the Q's offer: +2 Discipline

It's unlikely that any Crewmember will have much chance to earn Skill or Openness Renown during this episode.

Forms

Character Sheet

Name: | Player:
Rank: | Position:
Species: | Current Assignment:

Attributes

Fitness
- Strength
- Vitality

Coordination
- Dexterity
- Reaction

Intellect
- Logic
- Perception

Presence
- Willpower
- Empathy

PSI
- Range
- Focus

Background History

Stage	Description or Assignment
Early Life:	
Academy Life:	
Cadet Cruise:	
Tours of Duty:	

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Skills (specialization) Level

Advantages

Disadvantages

- Courage
- Renown
- Aggression
- Discipline
- Initiative
- Openess
- Skill
- Resistance
- Wound Levels
 - Healthy
 - Stunned (+1)
 - Injured (+1)
 - Wounded (+2)
 - Incapacitated (-)
 - Near Death (-)
 - Killed

Notes

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Plot Card

Scene

Summation

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Setting

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Plot Card

Scene

Summation

NPCs

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Notes

Plot Card

Scene

Summation

NPCs

Setting

Notes

Plot Card

Scene

Summation

NPCs

Setting

Notes

Creature Template

Name

Type

Size

Form

Attributes

Base Movement

Resistance

Special Abilities/Unusual skills

Weapons

Description and additional notes

System Template

System Name

Affiliation

System Type

Inhabited Planets

Other Planets

Other Stellar Objects

Artificial Objects

SIS

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Alien Species Template

Homeworld

Home Region or Sovereign Territory

Suggested Attribute and Edge Ranges

Fitness

Strength

Vitality

Coordination

Dexterity

Agility

Intellect

Logic

Perception

Presence

Empathy

Willpower

Psi

Focus

Range

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Sketch

Special or Unique Abilities

Special or Unique Skills

Size

Traits Common to the Species

Story Notes

Description

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Planetary Template

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Planet Name

Class

System Data

Gravity

Year and Day

Atmosphere

Hydrosphere

Climate

Sapient Species

Tech Level

Government

Culture

Affiliation

Resources

Places of Note

Ship Facilities

Other Detail

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